Communist Bulletin

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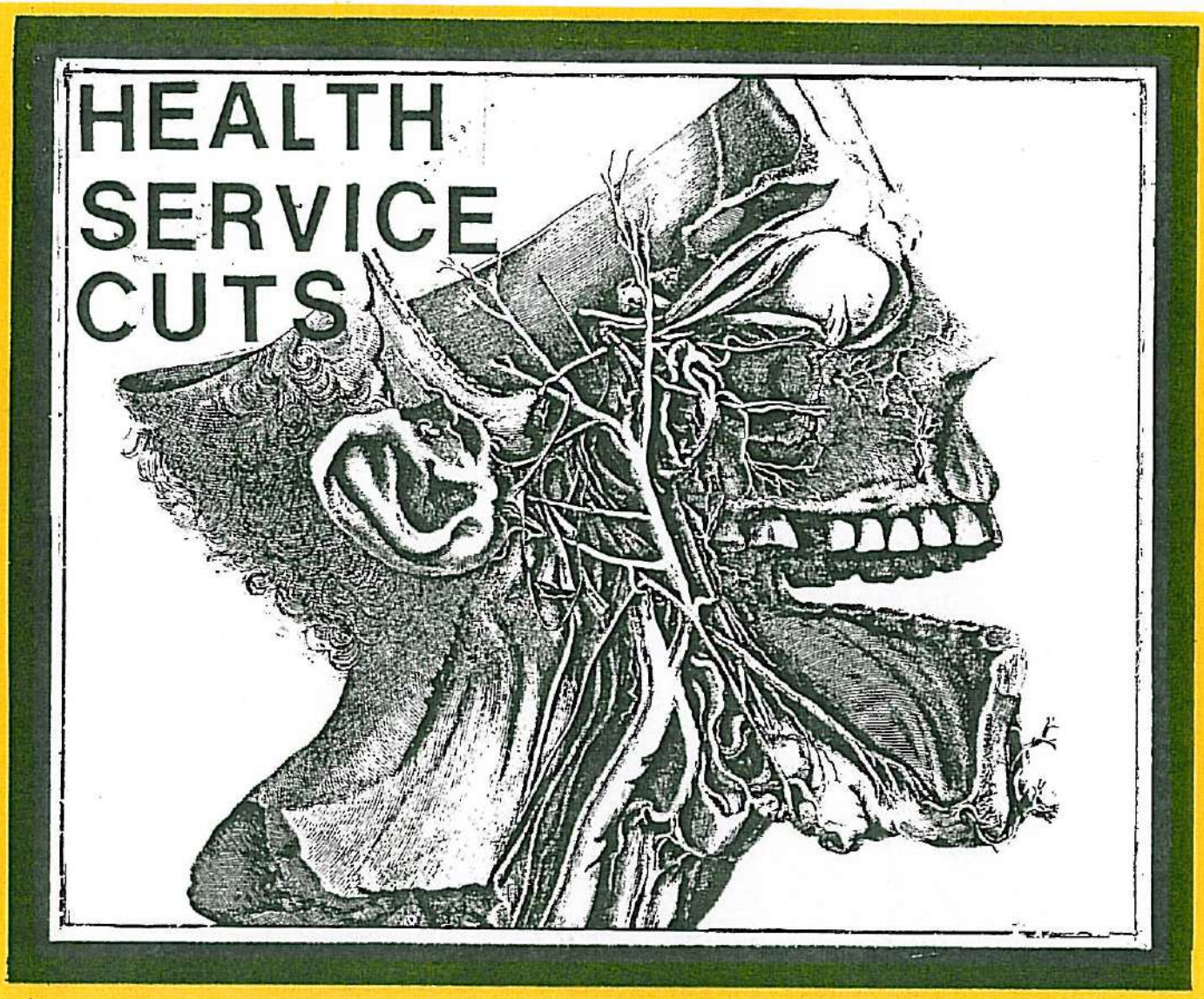

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FIGHTING BACK in the HEALTH SERVICE

The beginning of 1988 has been marked by the first significant wave of class militancy and action since the crushing defeat of the miners' strike. At the heart of the strikes which have involved car workers, seamen, miners and teachers, lies the anger and combativity of the workers in the National Health Service. The action was triggered off by the action of 38 night shift nurses in Manchester who struck against cuts in services and wages, but within weeks a nationwide avalanche of strikes, protests and demos had engulfed the health service, involving every single category of worker, from the nurses, the ancillaries, doctors and consultants, to the clerical workers.

The reasons for the anger and militancy are not hard to find. Successive governments have responded to years of deepening economic crisis by a relentless attack on the living and working conditions of the working class in a futile attempt to prop up the profitability of national capital. Part of this attack has been frontal - redundancies, closures, unemployment, wage-cuts, speed-ups on the shopfloor etc. - but another part has been to attack the overall cost of labour by savaging the so-called Social Wage. In other issues of the **Bulletin** we have documented the grim social reality of deepening misery and poverty this entails - the cutbacks in dole and social security payments, the decline and deterioration of the housing available to working people, the decay of the public educational system with school buildings literally falling down and classrooms without books etc.

are 40% below full staffing levels. Despite nominal wage rises for nurses, in reality their real income is declining, squeezed at one end by the rising tax/insurance burden - 21% of earnings in 1979, 24% in 1988 - and at the other by wholesale closures of nurses residential homes.

30,000 nurses leave the job every year to be replaced by only 27,000 new ones - 60 nurses are thus lost every week. Of those that remain over 40% are on less than the Low Pay Unit's threshold of £132.27 per week. A copper or fireman just started his job gets as much as a staff nurse with eight years experience.

Every week there are reports of beds, wards, even entire hospitals lying unused because the money to run and staff them has been cut off. When health care was nationalised in 1948 the number of beds was 480,000 or 10 beds per thousand of population. By 1986, the figures had fallen to 337,000 or 6.7% per thousand - hence the ever-growing hospital queues. And despite the much vaunted advances in medical science the actual quality of medical care, for those who survive to get to the head of the queue, is also inexorably declining. Conditions in mental and geriatric hospitals now resemble the horrors of Bedlam. In General wards, the constant increase in patient throughput has forced the discharge of patients as soon as they can leave their beds rather than being allowed convalescence time, (which in itself increases the nursing burden with a higher and higher proportion of seriously ill patients.) The atrocious wages of ancillary

The provision of health care has borne the brunt of this attack. Years of callous and chronic underfunding has brought the system to the point of collapse. Appallingly low wages have meant chronic understaffing. The RCN found London wards 20-25% on average below establishment while national midwife shortages are running at 17.6%. Other surveys have suggested that hospitals are more than 25% below capacity nationally and that in London

staff and a squeeze on recruitment has left nurses spending more and more time cleaning wards, fetching meals, chasing laundry and generally mopping up after the inadequate job done by outside contractors.

The anger and frustrations of health workers finally boiled over at the beginning of the year. The wave of stoppages and strikes spoke clearly.

"Enough is enough! We will defend ourselves!"

Among nurses the first ever strike took place at North Manchester General, following on a series of lesser actions throughout the hospital service. Strikes among nurses then spread throughout Britain. Among ancillary workers there had been widespread actions since last year, especially in Scotland, where the governments plans for privatising such services had been coming under fierce opposition from workers. There had been a 'work to rule' operating in many hospitals throughout January. Walkouts of entire ancillary staffs occurred with increasing frequency, opposed by the Unions for the most part, often over the victinisation of striking workers and often strongly supported by nursing and medical staff.

20,000 took part in a Day of Action in London in February and the national days of action, called by the unions in Scotland and England were very strongly supported. 2000 workers, including patients, linked hands in a living picket round the Royal Teaching Hospital in Liverpool. In Scotland there were marches and other actions such as pickets in every major city with over 60,000 taking some form of action and well over 35,000 demonstrating in the streets. Most encouraging was the support given the health service workers by other groups of workers. Workers at Vauxhall at Ellesmere Port took two days off in strike to support the NHS actions. Miners throughout northern England supported the picketing NHS workers. 3000 at the Royal Dockyard in Rosyth downed tools and over 2000 oil fabrication workers at Ardesier struck for a day so as to join the Day of action in Inverness.

The Need For Clarity

However, this impressive display of militancy, of willingness to fight, will be unable to transcend simple anger and protest unless there is clarity in the struggle: clarity on the targets to be aimed at: clarity on the enemies of the struggle and clarity on HOW to struggle.

Only the Tories?

Firstly, it must be understood that the attacks on the provision of health care are not simply wicked, TORY attacks. They are capitalist attacks, carried out in response to the needs of a crisis-ridden capitalist economy by whichever faction of the bourgeois ruling class is currently in power. The attacks have escalated in recent years, not simply because the Tories are in power but because the economic crisis has deepened inexorably demanding ever-more savage onslaughts on working class living standards. Although the pace and depth of the attacks is undoubtedly escalating, they are nothing new. They are merely an extension of what has gone before under **every** government. Only three years after the foundation of the N.H.S. in 1951 the Labour Party were the first to introduce charges "out of economic necessity" for spectacles and false teeth. Their record when they were last in power in the 1970's speaks for itself - nurses' wages cut in real terms by almost 20%, lengthening patient queues, ward closures, falling numbers of beds and a merciless squeeze on the wages of the lowest paid via the notorious Social Contract. The culmination was the famous Winter of Discontent when workers once again said **"enough is enough"**.

The reality is that every capitalist government throughout the world, whether or not they claim to be Labour, Socialist or Communist, reacts in the same way when the national economy is under threat. At exactly the same time the British health workers were on the streets protesting, Polish workers in the so-called Communist bloc were also on the streets protesting at the collapse of the Polish health service - wages 20% below average, staff shortages, ward closures, drug and even blanket scarcities, hospitals without heating etc.

We must be clear that the Labour Party and their cohorts the Unions, the leftists and Trotskyists, and all those who call "Defend the NHS" are against us in this struggle. Their programme for a state-provided health scheme is a programme dedicated to the health of the national capital not to the health of the working class.

Whose Health Service?

The movement towards a centralised state mechanism for regulating the entire social life of workers gained momentum in the late 19th century - a reflection of the growth of the state in the administration of capital. The Boer war was a fillip to this movement as the bourgeoisie were shocked to discover that tens of thousands of proletarians were too weakly and unhealthy to be sent off to die to defend profits. School meals, the growth of health care, the creation of community medicine began at this time although, until the 1930's these were still largely overseen by local charity commissions, private insurance schemes and local government. But in the 30's as the state prepared for war, the bourgeoisie saw the need for centralised national organisation of social services - something that was accomplished by WW2 so that the 1946 birth of the NHS was merely this aspect of the war economy legitimised and extended. Despite Labour Party and Union rhetoric about a welfare state, the small print of the Beveridge Report was quite succinct:

> " The plan plan is one to secure income for subsistence on condition of service and contribution in order to make and keep men fit for service."

You stuff oil and grease in your machinery to keep the lines moving, now stick some orange juice and cod-liver oil and the occasional pill into your workers for the same reason - oh, and don't worry, we'll make the bastards pay for it too.

The NHS has been notorious since birth for its inefficiency and inadequacy, and for its refusal to develop preventative and curative medicine. Any gains in the health of workers this century have been both ephemeral and a travesty of what could be achieved given the potential of modern science and technology: ephemeral because the few gains made were temporary and are already lost or are being lost now (infant mortality for example, is on the rise): a travesty, since at its very best, the NHS has been the palest of shadows of what true health care could be given the potential for medicare today, ignoring the corrosive effect on health of day-to-day life under capitalism with its stress, poor working and living conditions, poor diet, pollution and powerful alcohol, cigarette and drug industries. Capitalism creates illness, it is endemic and always will be under this sick system. Even the most idealised health service could only tinker with symptoms. The reality is, of course, that even that tinkering is secondary. The social control aspects of the NHS are primary.

And it is here that we can find the secondary, but genuine differences between the Tories and the

Labour Party. The Tories believe that they can deal with the social conflicts and unrest arising from a crisis-ridden, class-divided capitalism by more or less naked force. They believe it to be cheaper and easier to pay for a beefed-up police force than to provide health care - riot squads instead of nurses, shields and truncheons instead of operating theatres, security glass in social security offices instead of pension rises.

And Labour?

However, the left wing of the bourgeoisie - the Labour Party and Unions, the CP's and leftists - with their historical roots in the working class movement and their political power depending on working class support - are committed to a political programme for running capitalism which depends on buying off working class hostility and by getting them to identify with the organs of the capitalist state by painting it as "socialist", that, and their understanding of the anachronistic nature of private capital is the reality behind their programmes of nationalisations etc. But workers in every single nationalised industry know now that nationalisation is simply another weapon aimed at their throats. Miners, shipyard workers, rail workers and health service workers know the reality. "Nationalisation or Privatisation" is a false alternative for the working class. Both are just different forms of capitalist attack.

Workers' interests do not lie in defending the state provision of health, the NHS against privatisation as such, but in resisting the attacks that both programmes involve - the cuts, the closures, the falling living standards, the declining standard of health care, etc.

Fighting the Bosses and the Unions

The problem for workers is **how** to do this. Firstly, it is absolutely clear that if the fight is left to the Unions there can be nothing but defeat. The Tories attempt to destroy the struggle by dividing it - by promising more for medical staff than ancillaries, more for specialists than general staff, more for one geographical area than another. This is faithfully echoed by the divisions imposed by the unions - all 14 of them. Their interests are not our interests. Firstly, they want to maintain their own power structure, their own place in the machinery of the state. They will try to destroy any action which threatens that. They will not risk sequestration, they will not risk the loss of their funds and they will not jeapardise their relationship with management. They will not threaten the interests of the national economy. In the last analysis, all they have to offer is - the Labour Party in power! The years of Thatcherism and attempting to grapple with the "New Realism" of an apparently quiescent working class meant that the wave of strikes caught the unions unprepared. Their initial response was to openly defy the militancy and to call for an end to work-to-rules and to strikes (and in the car industry to sign deals that were totally unacceptable to an outraged workforce).

In the NHS strikes they have repeatedly sought to divert attention away from real actions against the Health Boards and the government into inter-union squabbles: COHSE blaming the RCN for not supporting them; NUPE blaming COHSE for not telling them about their Budget Day activities; NUPE saying in Scotland that they would not be arguing for national actions. When in some hospitals ancillary workers voted for a three day all out strike NUPE persuaded them to reduce it to one day only; elsewhere their proposals to end works to rule were angrily and overwhelmingly defeated by militant hospital workers. When confronted their argument was to claim that workers threatened to turn "public opinion" against them by such actions. Throughout they have sought to divide up the struggle, by job, by hospital and by union so as to better control 'their' workers.

Failing in that, they have moved to co-opt, control and limit the militancy, calling for useless one-day strikes and lunch-hour marches etc. The struggle can only go forward if workers wrench control from the unions by forming revocable strike committees answerable to mass meetings. It can only go forward if it breaks out of false union "solidarity" and embraces other sections of workers. Ritual union delegations from other workers on marches must be replaced by a genuine extension of the strikes. When workers join the strikes with their own demands and take up the demands of other workers, solidarity will have real meaning and power. Our only strength as workers is our solidarity and our ability to organise ourselves. The terrain of the health workers' struggle is a favourable one. It is not difficult for other workers to see that an attack on health care, and health service workers, is an attack on all: to see that the different struggles are in reality all the same, single struggle.

The struggle for decent health care in a rotting social system which cannot provide it points workers to the only realistic alternative - the destruction of this insane system and the construction of a society based on the satisfaction of human needs.

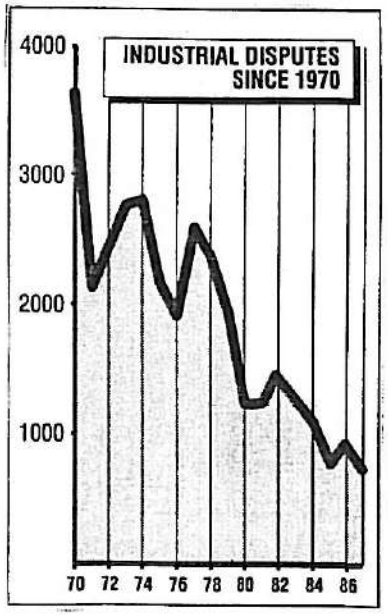
Cormack/G.M.

Workers Spring Offensive

The first months of 1988 have seen a spate of industrial disputes in Britain with health workers, car workers and seamen in the vanguard of what amounts to a strike wave. Following on from the Stock Market crash last Autumn, and preceding the severe depression forecasted for the second half of this year, the strike wave marks the beginning of a new period in the class struggle in this country.

The importance of these strikes is not that they are politically advanced - there has been no self-organisation and few moves towards generalisation, in both respects little to compare with recent strike waves in, for example, Italy and Spain - but that they are taking place at all. In the three years since their crushing victory over the miners the state has largely succeeded in keeping the British working class demoralized and passive. They have tried to ram home the message that struggle does not pay; that they are prepared to close down whole industries; that going on strike will lead straight to the dole queue. The ideological barrage has been intensive: the new vocabulary of the Thatcher era ("privatisation", "new realism", "enterprise culture" etc.) is drummed into our heads every day - just like Gorbachov's doublespeak the aim is to convince workers that a new economic order has arrived, or is about to, providing we make a few sacrifices now.

In 1986 and 1987 what strikes did occur (Wapping, Teachers, Telecom etc.) were kept isolated and the workers picked off one by one. During this period the number of days lost through industrial action has been lower than at any time since the war. Why has this tranquillity been shattered? The bourgeois press, caught on the hop by the strikes, put it all down to skill shortages and falling unemployment. In reality we are seeing a fight back against a fresh round of attacks on living standards. Thatcher's eight years of triumphs are not enough - mortally sick capitalism demands that the attacks continue and intensify.



If we look at three of the bitterest strikes - NHS, Fords, Ferrymen - we can identify three common themes. All three strikes have been militant fight backs against brutal, frontal attacks on living standards and conditions of work. In all three disputes the bosses have used a bogeyman - private medicine, Nissan, the Channel Tunnel - to camouflage the real reason for the attacks: world capitalism's long drawn out death crisis.

Thirdly the left wing of capital have been caught badly wrong footed by the strikes. The Labour Party has shown little ability to recuperate the struggles while the unions have experienced great difficulty in keeping things under control (often because the bosses have failed to seek their advice or accord them a more prominent role).

The Health Strike

Elsewhere in this **Bulletin** we deal in greater detail with the fight of the health workers. The government has set up a totally false debate about the future of the NHS; but for workers only two points are important: **firstly,** the state is cutting health provision (particularly for 'unproductive' sections of the population) as part of the general attack on living standards, and **secondly,** they are attacking the pay and conditions of the health workers for exactly the same reasons as they are attacking other workers.

Ancillary staff have been the target of a particularly savage attack; if they don't buckle down there is the threat that they will lose their badly paid jobs and be replaced by outside contractors. This has produced a mood of great militancy, a feeling that they now have nothing to lose by making a stand. When, on the 10th February at Ninewells Hospital in Dundee, a porter was dismissed for speaking out of turn there was an immediate walkout by 400 ancillary workers - in the past they would have left it to be sorted out by the disputes procedure carefully drawn up by unions and management to avoid such outbursts. Scenes like this have been repeated up and down the country, creating enormous problems for local union bureaucrats. At stormy mass meetings throughout February, NUPE and COHSE leaders attempted, often unsuccessfully, to get workers to call off work-to-rules and overtime bans. The situation calls out for mass action, generalisation of the strikes, demands that link health workers together - all this is anathema to the unions. They mumble about the need not to lose public support, and want to get back to their preferred tactics of useless processions to hear speeches by TUC hacks and bringing out key units in the hospitals for selective action at their beck and call. There has been enormous anger at union tactics, but significantly this has not led to workers taking the decisive step of organising outside of and against the unions.

One positive aspect of the dispute has been the new-found willingness of the nurses to take strike action, something that would have been unthinkable a few years ago. The final straw was the news in January that the government intended to scrap

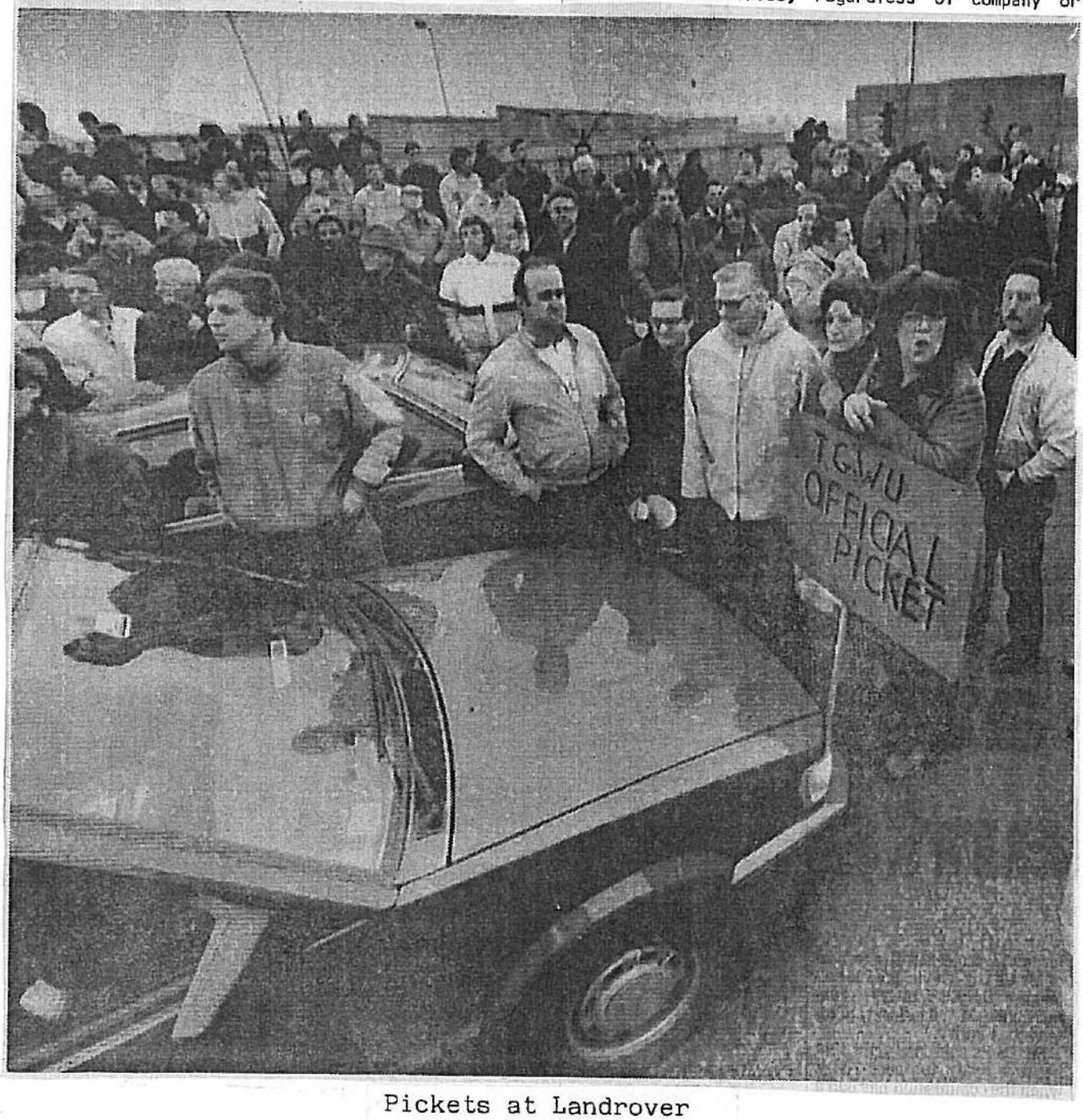
special duty allowances (payment for night shift etc.), producing a walkout by nurses at the North Manchester General Hospital and followed by similar action at other hospitals.

The state has had to be very careful in its dealings with the nurses, workers who clearly have the complete support of the bulk of the population. When on 3rd February, hundreds of nurses from ten London hospitals attempted to march on Parliament, they found their route blocked by massed police and riot vehicles - two nurses were arrested in the resulting scuffles. Pictures of baton wielding cops beating up miners may look OK on TV, but nurses suffering the same treatment does not look quite so good.

In Scotland the Health dispute has been particularly fierce. On 24th February, 60,000 health workers went on a one day strike and huge marches were held in all the main cities. Workers at Ardesier Fabrication Yard and Rosyth Royal Dockyard downed tools in support and there was similar sympathy action by numerous groups of workers elsewhere. But token stoppages don't hurt the bosses; the only way forward is for the health workers to unite their struggle with that of other workers. The RCN has been blatantly sabotaging the struggle, but NUPE and COHSE have performed exactly the same role by keeping the dispute separate from the rest of the strike wave and dissipating energy in completely useless activity. Despite the positive aspects of the health strike there is clearly a lot of ground to be reclaimed in terms of re-appropriating old lessons - self organisation, the need for generalisation etc.

Fords

Similar weaknesses could be detected in the Ford Strike. During the same month there were disputes at Land Rover, Bedford, Vauxhalls, Ford and the Renault truck plant, but absolutely no effort was made to link up the strikes. Instead of leaving it to the unions the striking car workers should have sent massive delegations to other plants in their and other industries, regardless of company or



Pickets at Landrover

union affiliation.

The attack being mounted on car workers is exactly the same as that being mounted on the health workers. "Matching Japanese competition"boils down to breaking down traditional demarcation lines, merging different skills, and above all speed-ups in the production line. Last year Ford announced plans to reduce the workforce at the two Dagenham plants to just over 5000 in 1992 (less than half the total working in the plants in 1980). Both management and unions miscalculated the militancy of a workforce with no great tradition of struggle, (and where 'troublemakers' have been consistently weeded out as the workforce was halved over the past ten years). The unions agreed to the company offer of a 7% increase this year, followed by 2½% above inflation over the next two, and to the package of efficiency measures. This offer was decisively rejected by the 32,500 manual workers at Fords in a union ballot, and on 4th February thousands walked out without even waiting for the official strike call.

The strength of the Ford strike was the lesson learned by the miners strike that long wars of attrition by a single group of workers cannot beat the bosses, nor can the useless processions and publicity stunts so beloved of the TUC. The strike was solid, (only a tiny component plant due for closure later this year remained in operation) and hit hard - before too long the management, under pressure from the multi-national HQ in Detroit, and in consultation with the British state, was backing down.

The weakness of the strike was that it remained dominated by the mentality of unionism. After the initial shock of the walkouts the unions were soon back in control, Airlie and co. talking in newly minted radical language and the T.G.W.U. promising a £6 million strike fund.

The Ferrymen

It is perhaps in the Seamen's dispute that the anti-working class nature of Trade Unions has been most fully exposed. In this dispute we see yet another example of a self confident management of an industry in long term decline determined to push through an extensive programme of "restructuring" and cost-cutting. In the case of the P&O men at Dover this amounts to an extra months work for **less** pay, not to mention the loss of 400 jobs and a harsh new shift and call-out system. No wonder the men at Dover weren't prepared to swallow that lying down!

The initial dispute at the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company sparked off a wave of industrial action in numerous ports, some of it sympathy action, some of it local disputes as management tried to implement tough new conditions of work. The potential existed for a mass strike of British seamen, but the National Union of Seamen was determined to prevent such a strike and to discourage joint action with french and Belgian ferrymen who face similar attacks. When grassroots pressure forced the N.U.S.executive to ballot the membership over a national strike, McCluskey announced that they would not be holding it after all when the courts conveniently deemed the action illegal. Yet again we see a union using the smokescreen of 'staying within the law' to excuse them doing nothing to spread the strike or make it hurt.

The militancy of the Dover ferrymen by itself is not enough. They have already been out for several months with no strike pay, (apart from a completely inadequate "one-off" payment of £50 from the bulging union coffers) and despite the hardship, only one worker out of 1500 voted to accept the company's latest offer at a recent mass meeting. But as the miners strike proved, if you leave it up to the unions, the bosses are bound to win a long war of attrition. Unless the Dover men take the struggle into their own hands and spread it to workers under similar threat in British and continental ports, they are doomed to defeat.

In past issues of the **Bulletin** we have pointed out that much of Thatcher's success in imposing austerity on the working class lies in the selective nature of the attacks. But as the crisis deepens, only option open to the bourgeoisie is class-wide austerity programmes. Already in 1988 we have seen the start of the attacks postponed while the Tories were making sure of a third term of office: health service cuts, DHSS cuts, Poll Tax, speed-ups and deteriorating conditions of employment. These attacks hit everybody and risk producing a class-wide response.

The significance of the February strike wave is that workers are beginning to fight back and reject the logic of capitalism. A step forward, but while workers remain within the union prison the initiative will continue to lie with the bosses. If the strikes continue throughout the summer we can expect to see the Labour Party and unions brushing up their radical image and ditching all the nonsense about 'new realism' so as to better derail the discontent in the workforce. The strike wave illustrated the present tremendous disarray of the Left wing of capitalism, but we need not kid ourselves about their capacity to recuperate by projecting a new militant face at the grass roots level.

For revolutionaries the task is to demonstrate to combative workers the utter bankruptcy of unions and union tactics, and to point out the communist alternative: generalisation and self organisation.

Organise the struggle yourselves in your own general assemblies.

Send mass delegations to spread it to other workers.

And to hell with capitalism's laws and legal system.

Rowntree

@@

Leaflet

IT IS ALL ONE FIGHT

Everybody here already understands that we have a fight on our hands. But unless we know HOW to fight, the Government will isolate us, wear us down and pick us off one by one, bit by bit. This is not just about Privatisation and not just about the Health service. All workers are facing the same attacks - job and wage cuts, speed-ups, cuts in services, in the N.H.S., in Education, in the social services, in Housing and in the Social Security system.

EVERYTHING THAT DIVIDES US, WEAKENS US.

We all saw the miners stand alone and get defeated. No single group of workers can take on the Government and win. Our only strength is to stand together. Don't let the Government and the Unions divide us. They are already trying to play us off against each other - more money for the medical staff than the ancillaries, bigger rises for specialist units than general wards, higher rates for London and areas with "shortages" etc. If they manage to buy some of us off in the short-term, we will all lose in the long-term.

DON'T TRUST THE UNIONS.

We all know about the sabotage of the RCN, but NUPE and COHSE are no better, despite the tougher talking. Last week, union leaders, including Allan McKenzie, brazenly told a mass meeting of the Aberdeen Royal Infirmary to call off the work to rule and overtime ban. They will defend neither the Health Service nor the workers within it. Don't forget that the unions have ALREADY agreed to and implemented "efficiency measures" - £17 MILLION saved in Scotland since 1984; £2 MILLION per year in Grampian alone, involving job losses and "hefty cuts in hours and bonuses" (to quote Allan Maclean, NUPE's area officer in Scotland.)

Their cronies in the Labour Party are no better. They claim to support us but in the same breath they denounce our strikes. In 1979, in the 'Winter of Discontent', it was Labour's cuts we had to fight against. If we let them run our struggles we will lose.

THE WAY FORWARD: SPREAD THE STRIKES.

Reject the Union plans for a long drawn out campaign of selective (very selective!) strikes. The teachers tried that for **two years** and were beaten. Our best hope is to extend the strikes, to involve **ALL** workers simultaneously - nurses, porters, cleaners, ambulance men, drivers, technicians etc. Don't wait for the Unions and their ballots. Call mass meetings of **ALL** workers and elect **STRIKE COMMITTEES.** Send large delegations to other workers to ask them to join the struggle - to the schools, the shipyards, social security offices, local government offices, to the factories and the mines. Miners, Firemen and Train drivers have **already** joined one-day strikes when confronted by delegations and pickets. We must unite our struggles and unite our demands.

ONE FLAT PAY RISE FOR ALL NHS WORKERS

AN END TO THE STARVATION OF FUNDS FOR HEALTH CARE

NO CUTS IN JOBS, NO CUTS IN SERVICES

IMMEDIATE STRIKE ACTION IN RESPONSE TO SUSPENSIONS OR DISMISSALS

ELECTED STRIKE COMMITTEES TO RUN THE STRUGGLE

The attacks we are facing today are not just Tory attacks. Workers all over the world, in the Western bloc, in the so-called "Communist" countries and in the Third World, face the same attacks - the inevitable result of a social system in terminal decline. Our struggles today point the way to the eventual overthrow of this rotten system and to the construction of a society based on the satisfaction, not of the market-place, but of human needs.

This leaflet is published by the Communist Bulletin Group. We can be contacted at Box CBG. Boomtown Books. 167 King Street. Aberdeen. Issue 13 of our publication 'Communist Bulletin' will be out next month with a major article on the current struggle in the Health Service.

Leaflet

THE NHS — WHO'S SERVICE WHAT KIND OF STRUGGLE.

Many on this demonstration to-day are not NHS workers. So why are we here?

The appeal from the unions is on the basis of our role as 'consumers'. It's our NHS, we are told, and we've got to defend it against the Tories attacks. But in reality its not 'ours', any more than the coal industry, Marks and Spencers or any of the worlds land, offices and factories are ours.

If the health service WERE ours it wouldn't be suffering from its current lack of resources in the first place. It would also be a very different animal alltogether from the present bureaucratically, heirachically run 'back to work' service we've got used to. Of course the health service WORKERS do a great job but they always face an uphill struggle whatever political regime is in power. We all know from experience that any attempt to make the service provide more for human needs rather than the needs of industry, profits, bureaucratic power or the 'nation' etc, requires, not reasoned argument with our enemies but the clout of united working class ACTION.

We can see in the courageous actions of NHS workers what we all sense is a possible beginning of a fight back against a common attack on all of us by the bosses and their state.

In the public services particularly, the strategy of lowering wages, worsening working conditions and dispersal of our forces through 'privatisation' is something we have, or soon will, all be subjected to. For a long time now the public service unions have been co-operating with privatisation measures and helping the government with its austerity policy. Recently, NHS workers, especially in Scotland, have shown that the defeatism promulgated by the unions CAN be broken. What we all need now is a COMMON fight against these measures. Without common united action the current struggles will remain week and isolated and the initial enthusiasm will wain.

United action of public sector workers is a real possibillity but opportunities also exist at the same time for unity to be built with private sector workers. Similar strategies are at work in private industry. Witness the action of Boddingtons brewery in farming out its transport section to the infamous TNT.

It's NOT Public versus Private that is the issue, but WORKERS EVERYWHERE AGAINST THE BOSSES BOTH PRIVATE AND 'PUBLIC'.

The present actions in the NHS have either been organised independently or by the unions under pressuee from the 'rank and file'. Militant activists have faced not only the scabby 'professionalism' of the Royal College but also the divisive tactics of the unions. Everywhere workers face the same problems in trying to organise an effective fight back.

Those militant workers who recognise the need to extend and unify the present struggles outside the control of the unions, urgently need to get together to discuss the way forward.

BOX W, C/O RAVEN PRESS, 75 PICCADILLY, MANCHESTER M1 2BU.

Leaflet

NURSES - AMBULANCEMEN - COUNCIL WORKERS - CAR WORKERS - ALL WORKERS! ONLY UNITED STRIKE ACTION CAN WIN!

No group of workers on their own can force the government to back down. The miners couldn't, and neither can the health workers. One-day strikes are obviously not going to achieve anything. To have any effect on the government, workers need to fight together.

Several groups of workers are involved in various forms of industrial action at present. Each group has something to offer the others. For example, Fords workers can use their industrial muscle to support nurses. This would greatly increase the chance of support from other workers, who are all affected by the attack on the NHS. On their own, health strikes will have no effect on the bosses, who don't depend on the NHS. But a few nurses could easily picket out pits, car plants, local councils - just about any workplace. This has to be organised outside union divisions, like the nurses who picketed pits in the 1982 dispute. All sections of the working class have one interest in common - frightening the ruling class into holding back from their attacks on us.

AGAINST UNION DIVISIONS

Before Christmas, the postal workers' union sabotaged the possibility of a strike by negotiating a deal with management. Before that, SOGAT stitched up the print workers' strike. Unions in the councils have divided workers and tried to prevent solidarity by saying 'this is a picket for NALGO members only' etc.. At Lambeth, NALGO shop stewards tried to turn a picket of the town hall into an ineffective demo and get rid of non- NALGO members who'd turned up in solidarity. We told them to get lost. The RCN is an openly scab union, but health workers have to watch out for other unions like NUPE and COHSE. Who stitched up the strikes of '82? COHSE called workers who struck during the Falklands war 'unpatriotic'. We can only win by completely ignoring union divisions, and organising mass meetings of all militant workers to decide what needs to be done, regardless of whether they are nurses, miners, car workers or whatever. A mass strike is just about the only way to stop the Tory offensive. Even this would only be a temporary victory - they'd bring in Labour to attack the working class, like they did after the massive struggles of '74. All governments are our enemy. Only the destruction of all states by a revolutionary working class uprising on a world scale can ultimately solve our problems, which are caused by the capitalist system.

The world economy is heading for recession, forcing bosses from Moscow to Mexico to attack workers to raise the ammount of profit they can squeeze from our labour. The next wave of Tory attacks are going to make the last nine years look like a tea party - layoffs, work discipline (the new nursing council, the new code in the mines), part time work, massive cuts in services, and the Poll Tax. THESE AFFECT US ALL!

The scum of the Labour Party have been willing accomplices of the government's attacks. In local councils, the loony left have been carrying out the same attacks as their Tory colleagues. Layoffs, cuts, redeployment of workers to different jobs, and in Camden, repatriation of black and Irish homeless people. Recently the Labour leadership denounced nurses who voted for strike action, saying this would harm their efforts to persuade the government to put more money into the health service.

WHO NEEDS DEMOCRACY?

Strike ballots are a way of delaying action and making strikes dependent on majorities in particular sectors. We can't afford to wait for a majority - minorities need to spread struggles directly to other workers by picketting. Where mass meetings vote for the wrong thing, these should be ignored by militants, who should go ahead and do what they know is needed, calling on the rest to follow their lead.

ALL WORKERS SHOULD PUT FORWARD DEMANDS FROM OTHER SECTORS.
Large flat rate pay rise for all NHS workers - nurses, ambulancemen, theatre staff, cleaners, porters, etc..
Enough funds for immediate free medical treatment for all who need it.
No to the UK Central Council for Nursing! Immediate strike action in solidarity with any nurse disciplined or struck off. Immediate strikes against any dismissals, suspensions, or redeployment. No to moderation and compromise! Spread the strikes as far as possible! For a winter of discontent, followed by a summer of discontent! (29.1.88.)

BY WILDCAT, c/o BM WILD, London WC1N 3XX.

ONCE MORE - THE CRISIS

The last time the C.B.G. looked at the development of the crisis was more than two and a half years ago at the beginning of 1985 in issue No.8. It is worth going back to recapitulate what we said then because in a very real sense the global economic crisis we are examining here is nothing more than a simple unfolding of the conditions we described and analysed then.

Temporary recovery

What we confronted in 1985 and had to explain was how an apparently spectacular boom conformed to our analysis that world capitalism was plunging into uncontrollable crisis. 1981-82 saw an absolute decline in the world economy - only the second one in the post-war cycle (1974 was the first), but by 1984 the recovery was, on the surface, spectacular. World trade grew by more than 9%, the fastest in more than a decade; inflation was low and falling; employment had risen by millions with 6 million new jobs in the U.S.A. alone; output growth was 4% overall - pretty healthy - but that figure hides a pretty staggering American performance - almost 7% growth in one year which was described by the OECD economists as more reminiscent of the 50's and 60's than the 80's.

What we did in that last article was to demonstrate that this recovery actually represented:

> " the expanded reproduction of the crisis itself on a higher plane."
> (Paul Mattick).

We picked out the key elements about this recovery.

1) That it was located primarily in the U.S.A. - more than 70% of the European growth was a knock-on effect from a US import boom.
2) It was based on financial jiggery-pokery which merely postponed a slump (and moreover in a way which would actually exacerbate the slump when it arrived).
3) It also involved a considerable attack on the working class.
4) The increased production actually represented a fundamental STERILISATION of productive capacity. It was a form of cannibalisation, of DISINVESTMENT.

The financial jiggery-pokery is familiar enough to us now - it was basically old-fashioned, Keynesian deficit financing. The budget deficit in the U.S.A. rose to almost $200 billion, turning America into the biggest debtor the world has ever seen. Japan and Europe were persuaded to finance it - to the tune of $250 billion in 1983-84 alone - by high U.S. interest rates and a hugely bolstered dollar. The U.S. economy functioned like a sponge sucking in every spare bit of capital from the world economy.

The consequences were predictable. The high dollar made U.S. industry uncompetitive; imports flooded in with a catastrophic effect on U.S. industry but providing the rest of the world with the basis for the 3% growth that took place, leaving America with a gigantic trade deficit. The capital outflow from the rest of the world meant a starvation of investment - the increased production that did take place was screwed out of old plant and increased exploitation of the class, coyly referred to by the economists of the OECD as "widespread negative wage drift". The capital which was sucked into America did not go to expand the basis for healthy future accumulation - it was used up basically by a massive expansion of the defence budget (see article in this issue) and a huge increase in the service sector - the fast food industry aerobic centres etc. In other words, all that surplus capital was sterilised. In addition, it was clear that the boom could not continue - just to stay still and avoid a collapse of the dollar and the emergence of runaway inflation meant the $200 billion in surplus capital had to be extracted EVERY year from the rest of the world - not a very likely prospect. The consequences of that were extremely volatile and fragile markets and currency instability threatening to get out of control.

The Real economy

Leaving aside for just now the stock market crash, what has happened to the economy since we wrote

that last article? Well, clearly the boom had run itself out in two short years.

> " The economic situation has deteriorated in recent months and OECD projections to the end of 1988 point to little improvement. Slow growth, high unemployment and large payments imbalances are likely to persist. Recent downwards movements in the dollar, which occurred despite unprecedented interventions in exchange markets, have led to rising inflation expectations and higher interest rates in the U.S.. These developments together with growing tensions in international trade relations and continuing debt problems, have increased the risks of a worsening world economic situation."
> (OECD Economic Outlook June 1987.)

G.N.P. growth has slipped from the 5 and 6% of 1984 down to 2¼%. Predictions for G.N.P. growth next year have been constantly revised downwards from an original prediction of 6 months ago of a sluggish 2 - 2½% down to a virtually stagnant 1 - 1½%.

Inflation has risen from the 2% in 1984 to 3½ - 4% this year with predictions of an acceleration next year, particularly in America. Unemployment has remained virtually untouched - 31¼ million in the OECD in 1984, 31 million today - ie 11% for Europe, 7% for the U.S.A.

> " Between 1980 and 1987 no net new jobs will have been created overall in Europe despite an increase in the labour force of over 6%. The average unemployment rate in Europe quickly rose to levels unprecedented in the postwar period, from 6% at end of seventies to 11% at end of 1985. Since then it has fallen only marginally and the current projections point to a renewed rise to a new higher peak in 1989."
> (OECD Economic Outlook. December 1987.)

European Unemployment.

1980	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
6.9	11.0	10.9	10.75	11.0	11.25

World trade which was boosted in 1984 fell back fairly drastically from 1985 onwards.

The production that is taking place displays the same characteristics we picked out in 1985. Firstly, it involves increased attacks on the working class. To quote the gentle words of the U.N. Economic Survey of Europe:

> " Unit labour costs continued to moderate in 1986 thanks to a further weakening of wage costs.... Growth in wage costs decelerated strongly in most countries."

As we have seen unemployment has remained virtually static while the growth in employment globally has dropped to about 1%. An increasing proportion of that has been part-time working - out of 12 million new jobs in U.S.A. between 1979 and 1986, more than 25% were part-time. In Europe, full-time employment actually remained static or declined; from 1979 to 1985 part-time working grew by 3%, full-time growth was zero. Part-time working is one of the easiest ways to hit living standards and cut wage costs since most part-time workers are excluded from fringe benefits, pension schemes etc. It is a very effective way of raising exploitation. The growth of part-time working has been paralleled by a similar growth in temporary employment where the same observations apply. A recent report by H.M.S. Recruitment estimates that at least 33% of the workforce are now in "flexible employment". In 1960, the comparable figure was 4%.

Average Annual Percentage Growth in Full Time and Part Time Employme

	1973/79		1979/83		Share of PT in Total Employment in 1985
	FT	PT	FT	PT	
US	2.4	3.4	1.2	2.4	17.4
Japan	0.5	2.5	0.8	2.1	16.5
Germany	-0.6	1.7	1.1	1.1	12.0
UK	0.4	1.0	-1.2	5.0	21.2
Total less US of all OECD	0.5	2.0	-0.1	3.1	13.7
TOTAL	1.1	2.8	0.6	2.7	15 7

In addition, the production that is taking place clearly does not involve a healthy expansion of the productive capacities.

> " An important element in the persistent and pervasive slowdown in the growth of output since the early seventies has been the slump in gross fixed capital formation particularly in the manufacturing industries. This reflects higher returns to investment in financial assets rather than to real capital. This deteriorating performance has led to large falls in manufacturing employment, thereby giving rise to the notion of de-industrialisation."
> (U.N. Economic Survey of Europe.)

Any investment which has taken place in industry has been "... simply offsetting the scrapping of obsolete capital equipment rather than adding to productive capacity." (ibid)

Changes in the Growth of Real, Gross Fixed Capital Formation 1960-84.
(TE = Total Economy; NFB = Non-Farm Business Section; MFG = Total Manufacturing.)

		1960-73	1973-79	1979-84
Germany	TE	4.0	0.5	-0.7
	NFB	4.4	1.9	0.5
	MFG	2.5	0.3	-1.7
UK	TE	4.6	0.2	0.7
	NFB	3.6	2.6	0.8
	MFG	1.6	1.7	-5.1
US	TE	4.8	1.6	-1.1
	NFB	5.8	3.7	0
	MFG	4.6	8.1	-5.9

In addition, the age of the industrial plant that does remain in service is rising at an unprecedented rate (especially in the E.Bloc) as demonstrated by the decreasing share of net investment in gross investment. (The ratio of net to gross capital stock indicates that part of the gross stock which has not yet been written off - the net stock measures the potential flow of usable capital still embodied in the available stock.)

In 1960-64 net was 50% of gross.
In 1980's net is 10% of gross (in many countries, much less.)
In other words, today, the building and machinery is 90% used up.

Thus, we can see that the end result of the mid eighties boom has not laid the basis for further healthy accumilation. To quote the Financial Times:

> " ... 6 years of uninterrupted consumer boom in the U.S. has resulted in virtually no increase in investment, savings or productivity growth."

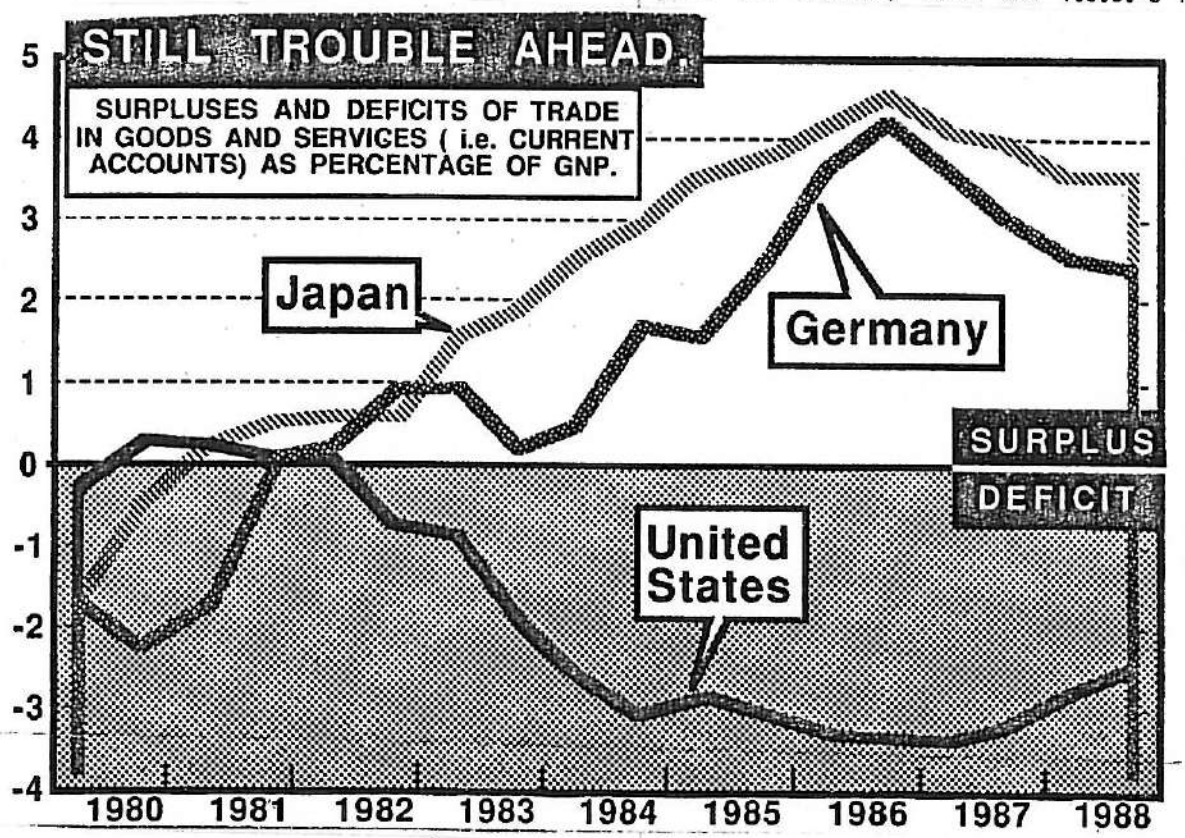
Financial Disaster

Let us look at what has been happening in the financial side of the world economy since our last article. The twin U.S. deficits have remained virtually untouched, matched by their mirror-image surpluses in Germany and Japan.

The panic this produced in Europe resulted in considerable efforts to orchestrate the process - agreements between the U.S. and Japan on exchange rates, the Plaza Agreement between the G5 countries in Sept.85, culminating in the Louvre Agreement in Feb.87. This was supposed to result in the U.S.A. swearing off protectionism, cutting its budget deficit, stabilising the dollar in exchange for cuts in interest rates and expansion of domestic demand in Germany and Japan (plus their secret promise to finance the dollar if it continued sliding. The Accord hardly lasted a week. U.S. trade figures failed to improve, the dollar fell even lower despite "unprecedented" intervention by European Central banks ($100 billion), as markets voted with their wallets and the U.S. Treasury turned a blind eye. The expansionary moves promised by Germany and Japan resulted in little more than hot air - Germany relaxed its public deficit by only 0.3% and Japan actually TIGHTENED by 0.4%.

The Crash: Black Monday

The whole house of cards finally came tumbling down on Black Monday in October 1987. One third of the world's wealth disappeared in less than a week. The actual trigger mechanism is hard to isolate but the fundamental cause is unmistakeable. The perception that the U.S. debt could no longer be supported became unavoidable. That and the ensuing fall of the dollar made it an unattractive investment. In fact, private investment in the dollar via Treasury bonds and I.O.U.'s had been



The U.S.A. now owes foreigners $400 billion; by 1990, at the same rate it will be $1,000 billion. Foreign assets in the U.S.A. now exceed comparable American assets abroad by $112 billion. Japan is virtually buying America. The instability of all this, the unsupportable nature of the debt, has produced two years of considerable volatility, to put it mildly, in currencies and stock markets. The clearest result has been the unstoppable slide of the dollar - 50% between 1985 and 1987. (Largely welcomed in the U.S.A. in the hope of reducing the trade deficit.)

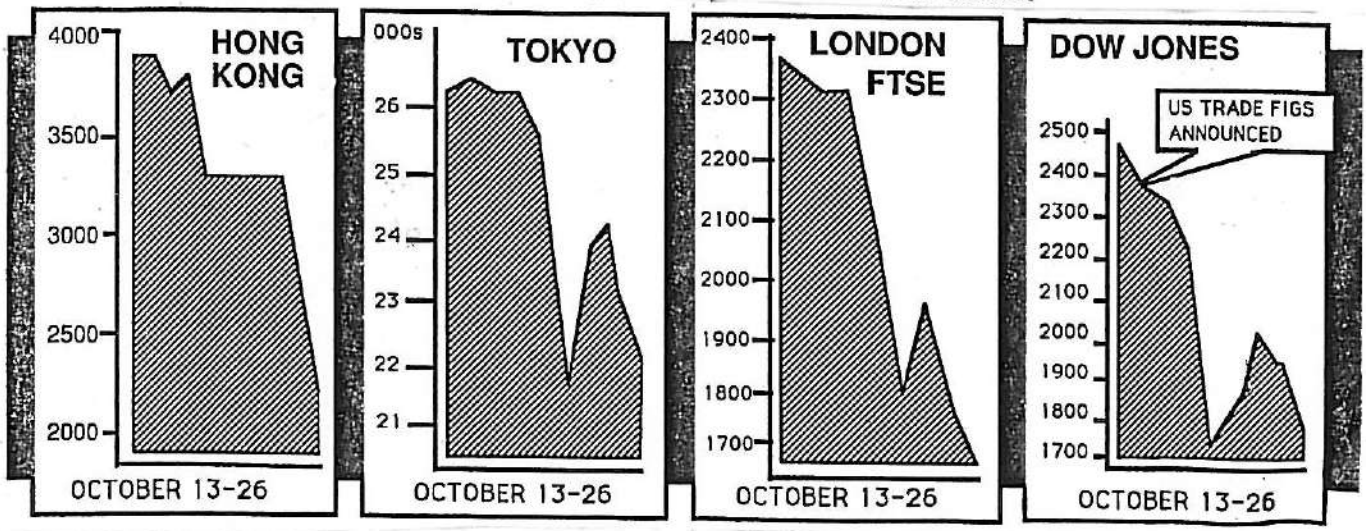
disappearing for 18 months prior to that. The stream of private capital went into the stock market instead pushing it to lunatic heights, leaving Central Banks (ie other Governments) to support the dollar. In 1987, virtually all of the U.S. budget deficit has been supported (reluctantly) by foreign governments. To quote the Institute for International Economics:

> " The financial markets decided that the Central Banks' buying could not go on indefinitely and sent a message. There is nobody in the

world left to lend money to the U.S.. That is what the market crash is telling us."

Today, six months after the initial crash stock markets have still not recovered. The FT SE 100 was 2400 in October, today it is 1750. The Dow Jones was 2600 in October, today it is 2000.

Clearly, the world financial and monetary system cannot weather the continuance of the U.S. budget and trade deficit. On a simple level, consumer expenditures alone in the U.S. have risen 2½% this year whilst disposable income rose by only 0.8%. The difference has been financed by foreign lending



This has more or less run its course. To maintain the deficits would require either 1) a massive expansion of the money supply, which in the context of the current weight of debt would mean the total collapse of the dollar and hyper-inflation -leading inevitably to a slump - or 2) a severe hike in interest rates to attract foreign capital, and given the swollen national and corporate debt would lead to massive bankruptcies and, at the very least, a slump.

What we are seeing now is a concensus within the bourgeoisie that the twin deficits have to come down. What has not emerged yet is how it is going to be done without causing a slump. The hope is that cutbacks in the U.S. will be offset by a reflation in Europe - basically Germany and Japan - who are being pressured to expand deficit financing, expand the money supply, expand their economy and consumer demand and abandon their trade and current account balances in order to make up for the cessation of demapd in the U.S..

However, nobody can figure out how to do this. The U.S. trade deficit appears immoveable, even with the catastrophic drop we have seen in the dollar it has not budged. European exporters who now have 24% of the U.S. market have simply cut back their profits to maintain their share of the market. More to the point, the deficit is now structural - much of the imports are now products the U.S. no longer makes - V.C.R.'s etc - and much of the American industry which still does exist now routinely contracts out parts manufacture - 60% of a Buick is now made abroad.

Cutting back the budget deficit is even more problematical. It did drop this year by $73 billion to $178 billion but it was a result of one-off measures - accounting tricks like delaying the military pay cheque by one day into the next financial year; plus windfalls from the sale of assets - Conrail and federal loans. The bounce back this year was unavoidable - at least $25 billion - which more or less wipes out the announced cutbacks ($30 billion this year and $45 billion next). On top of that, the cost of debt rervicing alone is expected to be more than $40 billion thiis year - again wiping out any hoped-for cutbacks.

For years, the U.S.A. via the I,M.F. have told debtor countries to balance their budget by cutting consumption. Now it is the U.S.A. itself which

GLOBAL COST OF A US BALANCED BUDGET*

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Increase in West European unemployment	0.2	0.6	1.2	1.8	2.7	3.6	4.7	6.0
US GDP %	-2.1	-4.4	-6.6	-9.0	-11.5	-14.2	-16.9	-19.6
US import growth %	-6.7	-11.7	-16.5	-21.4	-26.4	-31.7	-36.5	-41.0
West European GDP %	-0.6	-1.5	-2.5	-3.8	-5.3	-7.0	-8.8	-10.8
West European exports %	-1.9	-4.1	-6.9	-10.1	-13.7	-17.6	-21.9	-26.2
Latin American GDP %	-1.1	-2.5	-4.1	-5.9	-8.1	-10.5	-13.1	-15.9
Additional ROECD growth to offset US deficit reduction %	1.0	1.0	1.5	2.0	2.0	2.3	-	-

**Without offsetting reflation in rest of OECD and assuming $23 billion budget cut next year and balanced budget by 1993. Unemployment figures in millions for W. Europe. Per cent figures show difference from trend growth rates. ROECD = rest of OECD.*

Source: European Federation for Economic Research

faces an IMF austerity programme. The only way to cut the budget defoicit is to cut domestic consumption and slice into the defence budget. In 1987 it was $300 billion, 6.7% of G.N.P. (as opposed to a ratio of 3% in Europe). Hence, the pressure for detente agreements and area cuts. Also, great pressure is undoubtedly being put on the allies to assume a greater share of the defence costs. Apart from the social and political costs of introducing austerity in the U.S., economically it must produce a slump. European exports will be wiped out as the U.S. economy shrinks. And a shrinking economy itself pushes up the budget deficit via lower tax revenues and the increased social security costs of higher unemployment. In any case, Europe has shown itself extremely reluctant to reflate because their economies are clearly too weak to sustain it. Any form of reflation risks a very rapid increase in inflation, which will lead to higher interest rates, which given the weight of debt, will lead to bankruptcies and a slump.

It is impossible to overestimate the seriousness of this. The European Federation for Economic Research has calculated the results if the U.S. did manage to eliminate its deficits over the next 8 years.

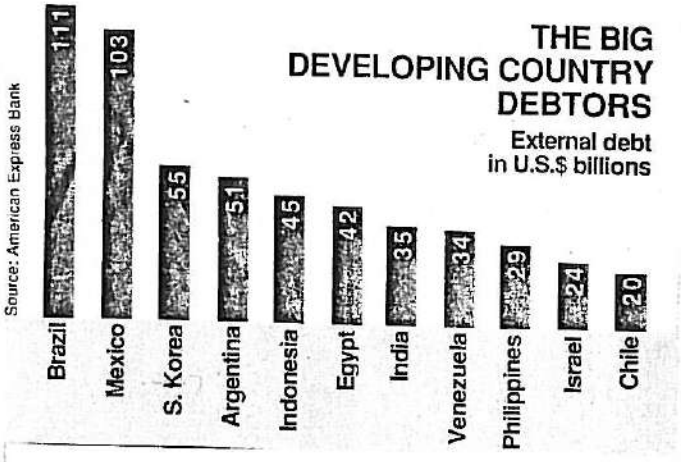
U.S. G.N.P. would contract by one seventh by 1993 and by 20% by 1995.
U.S. unemployment would double.
European G.N.P. would contract by 7% by 1993 and by 11% by 1995.
European exports over that period would decline by 26%

Contractions on this scale are unprecedented in the history of capitalism.

Crucially, 3d World exports, and any possibility of domestic growth, would also be wiped out, destroying their already, very shaky ability to service their massive debts. The Latin American countries as a whole are already facing an annual repayment liability double that of German reparation payments after the first World War. Interest payments alone are expected to take up to 15% of exports and up to 4% of G.D.P. Since the first panic within the world financial community in 1982 at the prospect of major defaults, strenuous efforts have been made to keep the whole banking system away from the brink by a programme of rescheduling of debts and waiving of service fees. However, the crucial element in the avoiding of defaults was the extra income generated by the enormous growth of exports to the U.S.A. If this disappears with the cutting of the U.S. trade deficit and the emergence of a slump it is almost impossible to see how defaults can be avoided. Even before the crash, the OECD Economic Outlook was arguing:

> " It seems clear that five years of management have not resulted in any fundamental solutions to debt problems. Indeed the root problems appear, if anything, less tractable now than they did in 1982: debt ratios have deteriorated rather than improved; in a number of countries domestic political support for the policies required to sustain debt service has weakened. The overall picture is clearly one with more disquieting than comforting elements."

The crash has turned the screws dramatically. A default would threaten directly the existence of at least a dozen major U.S. banks and two major U.K. banks. (As we write, Lloyds Bank have just reported losses of £248 million and Midland Bank losses of £505 million. All the big four clearing banks have reported dramatically reduced profits as a result of huge provisions to cover possible bad debts in the Third World.) The knock-on effect on the rest of the financial world and on industry would be catastrophic.



The impasse facing the bourgeoisie appears insurmountable - maintain the U.S. deficits and produce a slump with the potential for catastrophic dislocation of stock markets and currencies; or cut the deficits and produce a slump with the potential for catastroiphic collapse of the world banking and financial system. It exposes the idiocies of the Thatchers and Lawsons of this world who declaim self-righteously that the deficits are the cause of the crisis. In reality, the reverse is true - the crisis is the cause of the deficits. If it had not been for the deficits, the 1981 contraction of the world economy would have deepened irreversibly. The deficits postponed that but only to guarantee its re-emergence on a higher and fiercer level.

The whole of the post-war boom was built on the twin pillars of reconstruction and credit - ie debts were accumulated on the assumption that future profits from increased production would repay them. However, in this era of decadent capitalism, a larger and larger proportion of expanded accumulation is actually sterile from a value point of view - waste and armaments production. As we have catalogued, the real productive sector of the conomy has been shrinking - both relatively and now absolutely. But the debt it is expected to service is increasing with each turn of the screw. The last "recovery" of 1983-84 has taken it to the end of the spiral - the lender of the last resort - the U.S.A. - is now the world's biggest debtor.

Even before the stock market crash, it was clear that the world economy had exhausted the temporary boom of 1983-84 and was headed for its 3d major downturn in the post-war period. (1974 and 1982 being the first two.) Each "recovery" has been weaker than the one before and each crisis has been deeper. The last recovery clearly followed that pattern. To quote the Economic Survey of Europe:

> " ...during the upswing of 1983-86, the world economy grew more slowly, on average, than during the four year period prior to the recession."

Black Monday has ensured, at the very least, that

the downturn will arrive quicker, will have greater effect and will last longer. More crucially, it has demonstrated dramatically that the possibility of the downturn being qualitatively transformed by a catastrophic collapse of the bourgeois economic system, is a very real one. The inevitable downturn unavoidably guarantees a savage escalation of bourgeois attacks on the working class. The disappearance of the temporary boom squeezes the bourgeoisie's room for manoevre and limits their ability to mount isolated, sectional attacks on the class and thus lays the basis for decisive class confrontation. The possibility of economic catastrophe and the ensuing, simultaneous, class-wide onslaught on the proletariat throughout the world must qualitatively transform the revolutionary potential of the day-to-day struggle.

" Only when the proletariat must necessarily be absolutely pauperised are objective conditions ripe for a real revolutionary movement."
(Paul Mattick).

Cormack

BACK ISSUES »»»

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CONFRONTATION and CRISIS
The Reagan Years

The Communist Bulletin Group have written often in the past about the inter-imperialist struggle which lies at the heart of politics between the two capitalist blocs which dominate the world. With the economic fragility of the capitalist system cruelly exposed by the recent tremors in the worlds money markets and with the reality of both Gorbachov's reign in Russia and Reagan's demise in the US now firmly fixed in our minds it is a convenient time to look back over the Eighties, in particular at the spectacular developoment of inter imperialist confrontation which characterised the Reagan years, and the military build-up which underpinned it.

The end of the Seventies saw a fairly dramatic hotting up of the cold war which brought a premature end to the farce of 'detente' which Carter and Breznev had been lauding to the skies for much of their period of power. The pressure on Nicaragua, the invasion of Grenada, the tensions of the Gulf War especially on one side, and the attempt to bolster a satellite in Afghanistan against a Pakistani based rebellion on the other, threw into sharp relief the global competition of the two blocs even where it had been masked by the operation of satellites such as South Africa, Angola,France and Libya previously.

Both the blocs attempted, in the face of financial and economic crisis to tighten their grip on those regions of the world they dominated, raising the temperature as their competition, expressed in brushfire wars, grew fiercer and as the economic viability of these satellite regions themselves disintegrated. the most obvious example for the Russians is Afghanistan where, after half a decade they were still engaged in a bitter guerrilla war with western backed muslim rebels. Through their Cuban surrogates they have poured men, money and arms into their client states of Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia who had been coming under increasing pressure from western backed opposition forces and in the south from the South Africans. In the Sahara the Libyans had made enormous efforts to destabilise the entire region, backing all manner of guerrilla forces to take over the Saharan hinterland and trying to murder by assassination everyone who opposed them. The Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia had been strongly backed by Russia, dragging in, in opposition, an increasing financial burden from the West, unwilling to let the whole of Indo China destabilise as a result and forcing the US to reappraise its system of clients there. In similar, even stronger fashion the US and its acolytes made enormous efforts to regain their former position in the Middle East, hold off the Russians in Indo China, strengthen their brutal compradore regimes in South and Central America and in Africa mobilised their Boer stormtroopers, just as they had the Israelis, in an attempt to destroy the pro-Russian regimes there, discipline waverers and crush opposition movements. The further integration of China into the Western bloc was renewed at a greater speed.

Reagan's Build Up

To pay for all this the Reagan administration once it took power undertook a **$1600 BILLION** programme to modernise America's military capabilities. For modernisation to meet the new demands was desperately needed. as was shown, in particular by the situation on the Euphrates.

The war between Iraq and Iran, carried out by Iraq in an attempt to demonstrate that it could take on the role (and money) that previously the Shah's Iran had had of policeman for the west in the Middle East, and supported by the US as a valid attempt to defeat the 'anarchy' of Khomeini's Iranian 'revolution', failed miserably and the West was soon faced with the prospect of millions of Iranians sweeping across the Euphrates into the highly important oil areas of the Gulf states, if not beyond.

The Americans' much vaunted strategic force was showm in this situation, as it was in response to Afghanistan, to be a complete waste of time. It was very clearly demonstrated that the Americans capacity for conventional intervention in either the Middle East or Afghanistan was completely lacking. The Sunday Times estimated that the deployment of 1000 troops would have taken two days and 25000 troops would have taken 16 days. A new strategy was needed, a strategy involving a new Rapid Deployment Force and a Carrier based American navy capable of intervening ANYWHERE around the globe.

The Eighties thus saw, under Reagan, the rise to power of economic and military strategists in Pentagon known as the 'New Militarists'. Looking back over inter-imperialist struggle throughout the Eighties we can see their rise as an expression of this reappraisal of American power and redirection of resources to face up to the heightening of inter-bloc tensions throughout this period.

The 'New Militarists'

The aim of the 'New Militarists' was unashamedly, military superiority over Russia. While since WW2 economic muscle had been sufficient to ensure control over most of the globe, in contra-distinction to Russia's more brutally obvious physical control, the crisis situation capitalism worldwide was now moving into necessitated a greater emphasis on sheer military power to compensate for the relative decline in financial and economic muscle. The US felt the need to increase its role, throughout the world, in intervention to discipline and frighten its clients and their subject classes. As Francis West, a former Asst. Secretary of defence put it:

> " our goals are best realised by pursuing global military policies which preserve an aura of power."

To some extent too the new policies were a reaction against what the US bourgeoisie saw as the "Vietnam Syndrome"; as a means by which the US public might overcome their antipathy towards military interventions. As Lieutenant- General Bernard Trainor said in 1984 to the Current Strategy Forum:

> " If we **talk** about doing it, you are not going to get support. If you **do** it, if it's quick,if it's successful, and if it's bloodless, people will applaud it."

Thus the new strategy had the benefit also of operating in such a way as to strengthen the bourgeoisie's attempts to mobilise the proletariat behind the actions of their bosses.

The Three Pillars

The new policy had three pillars. Firstly it had to attain clear and decisive nuclear supremacy over the USSR. This was to be done by a massive and costly upgrading of all weapons and launching systems, MX Trident II, Pershing II,Tomahawk et alia. Secondly a 'Rapid Deployment Force' of 300,000 men would provide the necessary beefing up of the US capacity to intervene against Russian proxies, covering twenty countries in the Persian Gulf area, Southwest Asia and East Africa. This necessitated not only cash for the manpower and material but also a comprehensive network of bases throughout the world to support the Force, and the necessary cajoling and support of client regimes to sustain them. The third pillar was the change to the development of an American military capable of fighting a "protracted conventional-nuclear war" anywhere on the globe.

The first target of these proteges of Reagan, even before he came to power were the SALT treaties which Nixon and Kissinger had instituted and Carter had continued. They saw them as a sell-out of American strategic superiority. Lehman, the later Secretary of State for the Navy saw the diplomats who had created them as "unfit to serve" and demanded their replacement by men "chosen for intelligence and toughness", in other words himself and his co-thinkers. Thus when the Ohio class submarines were commissioned in June 1985 he refused to comply with the SALT II treaty and dismantle the existing Poseidon submarines until specifically ordered to by Reagan.

Once in power these intellectuals of the New Right commenced putting into power the complete revision of global inter-imperialist competition they had been arguing for in the military journals of the previous decade.

As alluded to above the strategy of the previous two decades had been at one level army oriented and at another worldwide. The prevailing assumption was that any combat would quickly escalate into a global nuclear war if it went nuclear at all. The alternative was to maintain a sufficiently large combat army in Europe, the key region of the world where the real fight would take place, so as to beat the Russians there while threatening the escalation to global nuclear war if the Russians threatened to win. The belief was that the Russians thought likewise. The New Militarists thought otherwise and the development of the economic decay of capitalism east and west and its propensity for thinking the unthinkable as the situation deteriorates brought them to the fore with a theory which could accept nuclear war without having to argue that it threatened the whole of the world.

"Limited" War

They argued that the West should be preparing for "limited war". This was defined either as a conventional war which could encompass the whole world, given the fact that it was no longer possible, they argued to say that there were still key areas like Western Europe and peripheral areas every where else, or a nuclear war which **both** sides would be willing to limit to one theatre only, in order to prevent global nuclear holocaust. As Naval analyst Francis West told Congress in 1982:

> " A limited clash with the Soviet Union, quickly followed by a ceasefire, is a possibility...A strategy of global flexibity does not necessarily mean simultaneous, intense conflict worldwide. Quite the opposite. It means assessing the opponents strength on the entire global chessboard, assessing the capabilities of theatre criticalities and assigning moves and countermoves designed to terminate the conflict speedily and with minimum escalation, while protecting the interests of the United States and its allies."

So much for nuclear war restricted to one theatre. The other possibility, they saw was a global war without nuclear arms coming into it at all. The Director of the Naval War College said in 1983 after conducting Global War games:

> " Global conflict will not necessarily lead immediately to the use of nuclear weapons immediately, if at all. The United States must be prepared to fight and win a conventional war."

The upshot of these two scenarios, radically different from the ones previously underpinning US global strategy were dramatic. Weinberger continually emphasised that the result of this reassessment of strategy must be that the U.S. had to be capable of pressing the Russians simultaneously on several fronts. As he put it to the Senate Armed Services Committee:

> " Our long term goal is to be able to meet the demands of a worldwide war including concurrent reinforcement of Europe, deployment to South-East Asia and the Pacific and to support other areas."

The upshot of this is that war commenced in one locale can be responded to not merely in that theatre but elsewhere around the world with sufficient force to ensure the stretching of Russian resources to the limit. Thus the potential escalation lies along the same two axes. Response on a horizontal axis as above in another theatre, or indeed a number of theatres, without the threat of nuclear war globally, or a vertical response in the theatre attacked including nuclear weaponry, similarly without, they believe, the threat of this avenue necessarily escalating horizontally to other theatres.

Thus the balance of importance of the various theatres had to be radically reassessed. They were not of course merely reassessed soley in terms of their ability to be included in potential escalation strategies. Throughout the Seventies a major reassessment of the importance of various sectors of the globe was being carried out. The relevant importance of the Indian Ocean as staging post for a global expression of American Power was reassessed, the series of military and political disasters in the Middle East strengthened opinion that this was an increasingly important economic and political area, and most important, the economic importance of the Pacific Rim and the increasing rapprochement with China forced a major re-evaluation of this crucial area in American strategic thinking.

To a certain extent the new strategies reaffirmed Dulles' policy of 1954 when he said that the US:

> " was willing and able to to respond vigorously and at places and with means of its own choosing"

The intention then, as it is now is to transform the Russian Empire into a threatened "world island" able to be attacked from wherever along its perimeter and forced to fear attack along ever one of its borders.

The Russian standpoint, all along has been, and still is that any such attack would immediately force an all-out nuclear reaction - the Holocaust. If this is true then the new strategy, it was argued in the Seventies and early Eighties, is an edifice based on sand. American strategists however, when Congress raised this crucial issue, argued that notwithstanding US propaganda portraying the Russian leadership as power crazed lunatics ready to launch nuclear war at the flick of a wrist, they were in fact leaders of "a mature superpower" and would respond to war as one. Though publicly they could be portrayed as reckless adventurers they were really cautious actors who would, in the heat of battle, make a rational decision to keep a war conventional or theatre nuclear in scope. They may have persuaded the US state that this is the case but they gave no guarantee that the Russian bourgeoisie were similarly persuaded.

With the new strategy determined it was already clear that the US military machine was by the end of Carter's tenure utterly unsuited to operating such a series of strategic policies. The existing strategy relied upon strategic nuclear power at one level and a powerful,primarily European theatre oriented, Army the another. The latter, especially, was considered redundant as the sine qua non of American might in the changed circumstances of the Eighties. They considered that the key to American power in the new period and the new situation was "maritime supremacy". As Late as 1984 Weinberger, even after the new policies were put into operation, considered that neither the Army nor the Air Force were planning for or preparing for global multifront interventions. It was the Navy which was soon to be seen pressing ahead and it was the Navy which lay at the heart of the new Global Strategy.

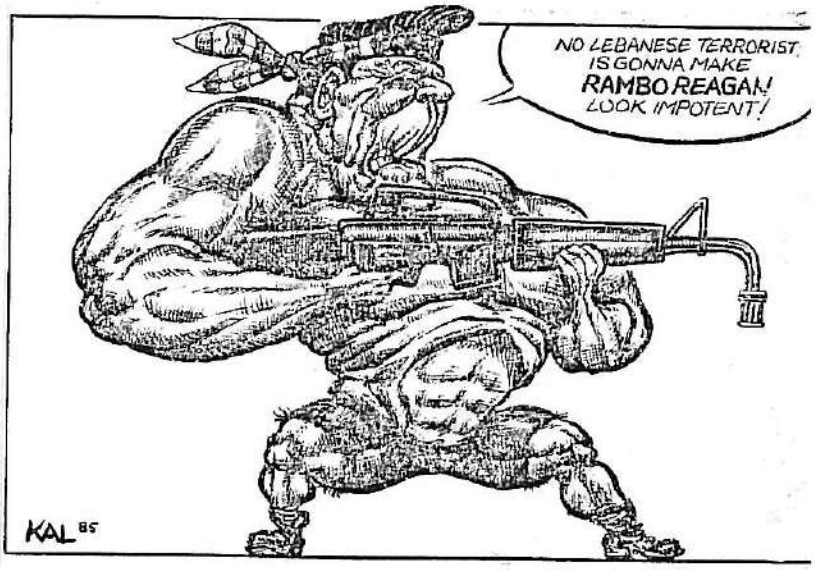
Building Up the Navy

Crucial to the new strategy is the ability not merely to build up US naval power to such an extent that it far outclasses the enemy's capabilities but also that control of the world's sealanes enable that power, unlike the opposition's, to be projected anywhere on the globe. As Weinberger put it:

> " Our naval force requirements are potentially worldwide, because ...we must be able to defend sea lines of communication along which critical US reinforcements and resupply travel to forward theatres."

Even more important was the resulting ability:

> " ..to conduct offensive operations against enemy naval forces and facilities."



Maritime Supremacy

In grand strategic theoretical terms this new policy had its foundation in the Nineteenth Century theories of Mahan and Mackinder who postulated the supreme importance of the political and military control of the world island in the period of imperialist expansion. For these thinkers the power base of the world resided in the geophysical world-island of Europe and Asia surrounded by the world-sea. Within this world-island lies the heartland and as Mackinder put it:

> " Whoever rules the heartland commands the World Island."

In the Nineteenth Century this was Germany. The counter poise to this power, argued Mahan, was control over the world-ocean. At the turn of the century this advocate of US naval imperialism argued that British power throughout the globe based upon its naval strength had effectively countered and overwhelmed the world island based powers of both France and the Germany. The navalists of the New Militarist bent in the US in the late Seventies similarly argued that the world island was dominated by the Heartland power of Russia and could only be effectively counterbalanced by the World-Ocean power of the US. It was useless to attempt to counter Russian land military strength by dispersing military forces around the perimeter of the Russian empire. The correct counter was the development of a naval might powerful enough to intervene anywhere along the Russian world-island perimeter. As naval analyst James Roherty put it:

> " The central role of sea power in American force structure rests on

the overriding need to control and to exploit the oceans in the critical relationship with the World-Island ..The oceans permit the United States to project, relatively unimpeded, immense power to points of its own choosing along the "rim" of the World-Island...The Oceans provide not just the primary mode of transit but a congenial ground for engagement."

The first step of the New Militarists therefore when they took power in Washington was to oust the interest groups whose power base lay in the existing defence establishment. Their most effective exponent was, not surprisingly, the Navy Secretary James Lehman, their main opponents the proponents of the old "Central Front" Euro-centric approach epitomised by Secretary of State Alexander Haig. The success of the New Militarists can be seen by the successive neutralisation and subsequent elimination of Haig from his positions of power. Edward Meese, Reagan's main counsellor was directly involved in the sacking of Haig in 1982 and from then on, with only the "small technical navy" reformers led by such as Gary Hart to contend with, Lehman could fight and win the battle between the services for the gigantic military budget that Reagan had initiated in the hotting up of the Cold War. Thus what on the face of it appeared merely as an inter-service budget battle was in reality a contest between radically different appreciations of what America's strategic military policy should be. Their success is demonstrated by the huge **$62 billion** allocated to shipbuilding. As one critic put it:

" the Navy is the only service that is getting substantial force structure: most increases requested by the other services have been deferred."

By 1984 Lehman's efforts to make the Navy the key element in the US defensive strategy had decisively won out. In Washington this was called the Lehman Doctrine and formed the basis for military planning throughout the Reagan administration. It consisted of:

Maritime Supremacy: its objective was "outright maritime superiority over any power..which might attempt to prevent our use of the seas and the maintenance of our vital interests worldwide..in short if challenged, we will be capable of sending any opponent to the bottom."

Offensive Forward Deployment: not merely sealane defence but a deployment "visibly offensive in operation." This "would prevent Warsaw Pact concentration of forces in Central Europe by forcing them to defend and distribute their forces against maritime vulnerabilities around the entire periphery of Warsaw Pact territory". Furthermore keeping the Russians thus bottled up would allow the US to maintain its policy goals elsewhere without interference.

Targeting the Russians: This offensive posture necessitates a capacity for simultaneous attack on the Russian Fleet, its coastal installations and supporting targets farther inland.

Expansion: To be able to carry out these tasks the minimum number of warships necessary was 600. The previous administration had allowed the navy to decline to a 'bare' 479 ships. Lehman proposed to build 133 new ships and refit 16 so as to reach the magic number by 1988.

This expansion centred on:

1. Aircraft Carriers. These are the centrepiece of the doctrine rising from 12 to 15 by the end of the decade and supported by a vast array of support vessels which will allow carrier centred battle groups to deliver maximum force anywhere in the world.. $17 billion was allotted alone for this purpose. Extolling the virtues of such groups Roherty said:

" The supreme exploitation of oceanic opportunities is achieved in the air-sea striking power of fast carrier forces. The versatility if not the mobility of the fast carrier force exceeds that of the fleet ballistic missile submarine, making it the premier ocean system...it is in the highly mobile and flexible capabilities of fast carrier forces that we confront the "continental" threat with a dimension that is unfamiliar to the enemy."

The navalists believe that such forces can survive even nuclear war due to their mobility:

" Its a matter of physics that ships are the best possible kind of bomb shelter there is." (Lehman)

They also suffer less from the political effects of land stored nuclear weapons from resident populations.

2. Battleships: These were to be resurrected. The New Jersey was recommissioned and three more WW2 veterans are being taken out of mothballs. Weinberger extolled their virtues thus:

" The battleship can...absolutely devastate and level whole areas, if that is indeed the mission."

3. Attack Submarines. The number of nuclear powered attack submarines will be increased from 74 in 1981 to 117 by 1989 deploying both conventional and nuclear weaponry, currently being expensively upgraded.

As can be imagined the costs to the American economy of this expenditure has been enormous especially when one considers that other military expenditures such as "Star Wars" has also been massively increased. Even before the October financial crash there was an ever widening gap between US desire to build up its military forces thus and its ability to sustain the cost. The answer was to spread the load as widely as possible. As Admiral Watkins reported to Congress:

" All tasks cannot be accomplished simultaneously without considerable risk. Thus our current maritime strategy emphasises maximum use of the other services and our allies in coalition warfare. We know that any major war conflict will involve our allies."

Hence the enormous effort put in by the US to persuade, force et alia, its allies in Europe to take a "fairer share" of the burden of maintaining military forces there, of contributing to the "defence" of the North Atlantic and of financing and supporting the maintenance of political power in the West's clients throughout the world.

Hence the efforts to persuade China to upgrade and revitalise its military potential to divert Russian strength on that front and to integrate its military strength with that of the US.

Hence the, thus far, mainly despairing efforts to persuade Japan to play its "proper" role in the defence of the Pacific by eliminating the advantage it has over other major economies by having a derisory military expenditure and diverting far more of its surplus to military expenditure.

Hence, in a politically deteriorating situation in the Third World, the efforts, often frantic at times, to either bolster increasingly redundant oppressive regimes on the point of overthrow or to arrange their supercession in the face of increasingly serious popular opposition so that a pro-US puppet is retained in power with a democratic facade if necessary, a regime more able than the dictatorships they succeed to mobilise the population for the austerity and military build-up required for these countries to support and aid the US strategy of contestation.

region. (see **Newsweek** of February 1988 for the most recent in a long line of 'analyses' supporting this contention.) In 1985 they spent **$47 billion** alone there. Though this constituted only about 20% of US spending it is a sum considerably in excess of the GNP of most countries in the region and is about 200 times greater than US economic assistance to East Asia in 1983.

In the US pundits are already proclaiming a 'Pacific Century' focussing on what they see as the economic strength of the region. A 1981 article in the Wall Street Journal suggested:

> " When we measure the near-unoptimised markets of Europe and its 250 million persons against the 1.5 to 2 billion people of the Pacific basin alone Europe seems a puny affair."

Now this is just so much hogwash but it represents the US bourgeoisie's attempt to seek new profits and new markets in regions which, until recent decline, seemed to allow further capital accumulation at a rate of profit clearly unavailable in Europe, or the US for that matter.

Both economic searching for profit and military searching for superiority and control lie at the heart of US interest in the region.

On one flank there is the growing "socialist modernisation" of China, strengthening, the New

The Pacific Battlefield

Let us look at one particular region of the world where this military build-up is most noticeable. The Pacific. This is, as indicated above, an area being upgraded in importance not only by the US military but by the US bourgeoisie as a whole: moreover it is a major area where the US, as we shall see considers its new assessment of the possibilities for war are, in their eyes, most clearly vindicated.

> " We are a Pacific nation and a force for peace and stability in the region. The future lies in the Pacific."

The Pacific constitutes for the New Militarists and their political masters, an increasingly important

militarists believe, the military position against Russia along a long fragile border on land as well as increasingly offering the possibility of access to what they consider to be the untouched, and potentially vastly profitable, Chinese market.

On the other flank there is the low wage cost driven exploitation of the workers of Korea and Japan which, until recently had major US Corporations such as IBM and Westinghouse declaring that their fastest growing markets lay in Asia-Pacific. US trade with the Pacific already outstrips that with Europe by one third.

Thus the vast US presence there is both the confront the Russians in a region where they are seen as weak (see below) and to protect what the US bourgeoisie sees as a vital productive area of its empire as well as a potentially expanding market.

Thus the increase in forward deployed warships in the Pacific from 21 in 1980 to 40 in 1983. Thus also the revival of the Special Forces set-up in Okinawa, the general expansion of Marine forces throughout the region and the crash build up of Diego Garcia as an island base to permit the Rapid Deployment Force to transfer its firepower even into the Indian Ocean to protect that flank.

It is also in this region that the increasing limitations of US military power and expenditure has become most apparent as the economic crisis deepens for world capitalism. The vastness of the region and the sheer numbers of states and peoples means that, especially after Vietnam the US is fully aware that it cannot both confront the Russians along the world-rim **and** hold down native populations increasing pauperised by the development of the crisis and the rapacious reaction of both indigenous and US capitalists in response to it. Thus it is here that we have seen most clearly both political and military attempts to integrate the client states and turn them into reliable forces who can contribute more to the defence of the region and to the attack on the Russians than they were hitherto able or willing to. Japan, especially, is under tremendous US pressure to increase the speed of its remilitarisation. South Korea and the Phillipines are areas of increasing concern for the US bourgeoisie. The political solutions to internal collapse has primarily been the elimination of dictatorial rule by aged gangsters like Marcos and Chun and their replacement by acceptable and better able 'democratic' gangsters like Aquino. The difficulties the US and these new teams are having demonstrates the difficulties the US is likewise having and will continue to have in its attempts to revitalise its rule in the Region. Taipei and Thailand may well be next on the cards for the 'democratic' treatment, though the outrage at 'democratic' New Zealand saying 'no thanks' to US ships has undoubtedly tempered the ardour for democracy somewhat. It goes without saying that this push to democracy among the client states is joined to a massive buildup of their military capacity which ensures military support for the new regime and aids the US strategy of confrontation with Russia. Korea, for example, already one of the most militarised countries in the world, has been upgraded from a "significant interest area" to a "vital interest area". In Indo China the attempt via the Khmer Rouge and their recent allies (and former deadly enemies) to bleed Vietnam white continues with the added bonus of allowing the US to argue for the militarisation of South East Asia in the face of the "Vietnamese threat".

Why so much effort here? Is the US bourgeoisie convinced that the future lies here? Well, some of them are, but it is the military possibilities that so excite Weinberger and friends. For it is precisely here in the Pacific that the new strategies **could** be demonstrated to be accurate with, they believe, least risk.

It is here that the US believes that a single front war could be fought and won without necessarily escalating into global nuclear war.

The Russian Position

Lets look at the Russian position here. For a start the Russians cannot project conventional military force against the US mainland from this region. For a second the Russian military forces here are at the end of a long vulnerable supply line, threatened by China along thousands of miles and in seapower considerably weaker than even US naval forces locally, never mind what the US could get there if it needed to. Thirdly Russian power rests in two distinct areas, the Russian Far East and Vietnam which are geographically isolated from each other and fourthly, Russian forces are completely defensive in nature with no possibility of expanding from their existing baseline. And lastly the destruction of this power and the possible occupation of Vladivostok (and probable nuclear destruction of Vietnam) it is believed, though a defeat, would not be regarded by the Russians as an absolutely vital blow to their power. Such a success would, however take an entire region out of threat from the Russians who would have no land or naval capability there. The Pacific would become a wholly US controlled lake.

Now this may be fanciful, merely the twinkle in a few strategists and Admirals' eyes. but it fulfils all the strategic requirements of the new policy and should not be forgotten. If the circumstances arose where the US actively sought regional war with the Russians this is precisely the locale

The Myth of the Russian Juggernaut

One of the key arguments our masters have put forward in their efforts to persuade us of the need for more and better weaponry to face the Russians has been the 'overwhelming superiority' of the Warsaw Pact forces. Even within the bourgeoisie, such as Thatcher has harped on incessantly on this single tune in order to persuade their European allies to dance to Reagan's tune and cough up more. Of course this means persuading such as Kohl to screw even more out of German workers, just as Thatcher is trying to do out of British workers.

The big bad bogeyman of the Russian military behemoth is now regularly trotted out. It is interesting therefore to see organisations such as the Western European Union putting into print what we have all known for years, that such superiority is a complete myth. Evidently the bourgeoisie of Germany and their pals are so incensed that the arguments **they** have used on their own proletariats are being used against them that they have now allowed the truth out into the open in their inter bourgeois argument.

Thus a recent WEU report published by the Defence Committee of the WEU's Parliamentary Assembly notes the following. Overall it claims that the Warsaw Pact's superiority over NATO is only 1 to 0.5 in terms of armed forces and 1 to 0.8 in terms of military expenditure. It estimates that the Warsaw Pact has the equivalent of 104 NATO divisions while NATO has 76, excluding Spanish forces, a far cry from the 3 to 1 advantage bruited abroad by experts as necessary for a successful attack on Western Europe. It estimates that NATO superiority over the Pact in naval facilities is overwhelming with a "monopoly of aircraft carriers for conventional

which fits the bill.

What kind of state is Russian arms in then here that the US can contemplate victory. As mentioned above the Russians have a soley defensive posture in the Pacific. To defend the Far East from air attack they have adopted a 'hedgehog' defensive system with short range only MIG jets having a range of only 390km, a range utterly unable to reach seaborne American naval material standing off the coast. There are some 100 Sam 4 and 6 missiles protecting vital installations but their effectiveness is to a very large extend dependent upon a radar system which was proven wanting during the KAL 007 affair. US military analyses put great stress on the 2000 odd fighter and bomber planes allegedly deployed by the Russians in the Far East but these are predominantly capable only of territorial defence and are furthermore mainly deployed along the Chinese border not on the coastline of the Pacific. As the former Secretary General of Japan's Joint Chiefs of staff said:

> " It is..doubtful whether they have the capacity to conduct air-to-air fighting or to mount air-to-air ground assaults following flights across the sea. Even if they had the capacity to perform such missions, they would naturally have to be accompanied by AWACs. But the Soviet AWACS..lag far behind their American counterparts."

However the Russian strategic posture in the Pacific depends not so much on their airpower but also mainly on their Pacific Fleet. In 1983 the US estimated this to consist of 84 surface ships, 122 submarines and 12 amphibious vessels. It covers the whole of the Russian coastline divided into two distinct fleets centred on Vladivostok.

Though navalists such as Lehman publically proclaim this force as a threat to US power in the Pacific, in the technical journals they are more willing to admit that the Russian fleets primary, indeed only role is to defend the Russian coastline and to declare without fear of contradiction, even from the Russians, that the Russian fleet would be speedily wiped out if it ever ventured outwith its base areas in wartime. As Japanese Admiral Sakonjo put it in 1982:

> " It is totally inconceivable that the Soviet Union's major surface ships will move into the Pacific and attack Japanese and American warships or cargo ships or sea lanes."

Thus the strategies of the two opposing naval armadas are wholly different. While the US's policy is one of offensive defence potentially leading to offence per se, the Russians are capable only of defensive defence. Though the Russians too are desperately upgrading their navies to combat the Americans the carriers they are building for use in the Far East are already years if not decades behind western naval military technology and at best will be able only to provide a mobile defensive platform within the inner sea they control off the immediate Russian coast. As one observer put it:

> " ..the Soviets will require a Herculean effort to simply maintain the status quo against new US deployments."

If the Russians venture out into the Pacific at all it will be by way of quiet nuclear submarines to attack shipping throughout the Pacific and extend the attack to the US coastline - circumstances which the New Militarists policies specifically exclude from their thinking.

Into the Nineties

This then was the global scenario worked out in the Seventies and, by and large, implemented in the Eighties by Reagan and Weinberger as the state representatives of a bourgeoisie bent on the upgrading of US military might and the hotting up of the Cold War in preparation for actual face to face conflict with the Russians.

How then has the clearcut evidence of the crisis and recession, illuminated by the financial collapse of last October, effected this analysis and the policies of movement towards war.

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fixed wing aircraft and a clear superiority in ocean-going surface forces." Though, it says, there is a rough balance in fighter bombers and ground attack aircraft, such is the technological superiority of NATO that this is in numbers alone, NATO forces being far superior in performance.

Even on that most hoary of myths, the supposed 2.5 to 1 superiority in tanks deployed, the report notes that, despite the imbalance in numbers:

> " 34% of all US main battle tanks are the 1980s model M-1 with some 4,800 in service. There are only 1400 comparable T-80 tanks in the Soviet Forces."

These modern tanks represent 34% of all US main battle tanks while their equivalents in the Russian Army represent only 2.5% of Soviet Tanks. The report further highlights the NATO superiority in anti tank equipment, both in terms of numbers and modernity of such missiles.

The report is clearly cynical about the validity of many of the claims that have surfaced as 'statistics' in recent NATO reports. It says:

> " ..the committee could not fail to notice over the years the way in which official Allied statements concerning the levels of some weapons systems held by the Soviet Union have lacked consistency and in some cases have ranged so widely that their credulity is jeopardised."

A "case in point" it argues is the oft proclaimed volume of chemical weaponry the Russians have. The report compares the oft cited volume of 300,000 tons with the true figure of only 30,880 tons.

The report concludes with an assessment of the unreliability of most of the Russians' allies in any war with NATO and altogether paints a picture of Warsaw Pact vulnerability that would lead one to suggest that a non-nuclear conflict in Europe is more likely to be fought on the banks of the Vistula than on the banks of the Rhine.

The paradox which faces world capitalism has been brutally restated and made even clearer by the events of 1988. The world economic crisis forces the two capitalist blocs into a position of heightened contestation as both sides begin to realise that the only way out for them, beyond the pauperisation of the proletariat is World War. Thus both sides are **forced** into a massive build-up of military strength in preparation for such inter bloc conflict **precisely** at a time when the economic resources to carry up this expansion are being whittled away by the very economic crisis which has produced such a need in the first place. Not only are the bourgeoisie faced with the prospect of having to drastically cut their 'normal' expenditure in face of the economic reality of recession but are forced to contemplate further cuts so as to be able to afford the upgrading and expansion of their military capabilities. This thus forces, at one end of the scale, a heightened attack on the living standards of the proletariat in the industrialised countries of each bloc and, at the other end, the absolute pauperisation, the reduction almost to barbarism of the most peripheral states such as in Africa.

This, however, reveals a second paradox. The nature of the build-up, as described above, necessitates the greater integration of those countries of the bloc who cannot be allowed to slip into barbarism. This is so that they can play a greater part in the confrontation with the opposing bloc. In the face of economic collapse and recession this has meant, in the West, the abandonment, where possible, of the now outmoded brutal dictatorships of military goons, long the darlings of the US bourgeoisie, and their replacement by 'more mature' democratic faces more able to contain the wrath of a pauperised population and to delude them with the fantasy of democracy. However it is the military which are at the front of US (in particular) concerns, it is the client state' military capabilities which are at the head of the queue in terms of the increased demands the new confrontation policies are requiring. The US depends more than ever now on the military of these countries to hold the client state together in the face of economic collapse, in the face of potential rebellion in favour of the opposing bloc, and in the need to integrate them in the bloc wide reassessment of responsibilities in the event of war.

Thus we have seen the bizarre notion of 'military democracies' proliferating throughout the 'third world'. This is best exemplified by the desperate efforts of the US to ensure the victory in elections of candidates supported by the military, such as Aquino, or candidates of the military themselves as in Korea. Thus they hope to substitute military dictatorship with military democracy, oblivious of the fact that such a contradiction in terms is blatantly at odds with their stated intention to safeguard their clients by means of a move towards democratisation.

The Ill Health of Capitalism

What the economic crisis of October in the stockmarkets of the world shed light on was the clear ill health of the capitalist system, the crippling state of Third World debt and the fact that 'slimmer but healthier' had merely meant slimmer **and** sicker. Now, not even the most optimistic pundit has the nerve to claim that everything is alright. Now they are all forced to openly admit that the prospect in the West is recession this year in America and next year in Europe - to paraphrase **The Guardian.**

The task the bourgeoisie has set itself then of gearing up for war is now immeasurably harder now that they thought it was a year ago. They are now talking about major cutbacks in the military expenditure planned, as Reagan's acceptance of the budget deal shows. Last month, as 'Cap the Knife' Weinberger was receiving his honorary knighthood from his doting pal Thatcher he was being faced with the dismantling of the "strong, well defended America" he had fought so long and hard to create. In 1985 he had announced a five year plan that committed the Pentagon to spending $2 trillion, double the defence expenditure of the previous five years. Today we have Congress, panicked at the economic state of America forcing Weinberger's successor, Frank Carlucci, to reluctantly approve the slashing of that budget by more than $32 million this coming year and at least a further £300 million over the next three years. The US is now on the brink of at least four years of bloodletting which will lead inevitably to a fundamental restructuring of its armed forces.

Weinberger Escapes

Webb, the Secretary of the Navy since Lehman saw the way the wind was blowing and resigned, to write his memoirs (sic), has also now resigned, strongly objecting to the " postponement of the 600 ship navy". Few now believe this will ever see the light of day. The 1989 budget has already mothballed 16 Frigates leaving the Navy peaked at 580 ships and fifteen battle groups. The Airforce is cutting manpower by 23,000 and scrapping a whole range of upgrading projects like the Midgetman ballistic missile system. The Army, already cut in the past decade has been forced to bloodlet some more, losing the A6F fighter and LHX helicopter programmes. This may seem painful to them now but they are a fleabite to what is planned for the next couple of years. It is likely that the Navy will have to abandon a further three battle groups in the 1990 Budget and a delay, or possibly even the abandonment of its nuclear submarine programme.

These forced cuts, based on their realistic appraisal of their economic situation represents the real fears of the bourgeoisie that they will fall behind in their own programme for confrontation with the Russians. We can expect to see, indeed have already seen in recent weeks, renewed efforts to dragoon the 'allies' behind the US into major increases in military expenditure.

Thatcher's recent haranguing of Nato and her declarations of intent vis a vis Trident as well as Howe's lecturing of the Russians in Moscow on conventional superiority are merely the US's most servile lapdog leading the pack in such geeing up.

When Webb spoke to the National Press club in Washington in January as outgoing Navy Secretary, he gave the European allies clear warning of stormy

seas ahead. He argued that unless the European members of Nato matched US expenditure, did 'their bit for the Free World' then the US should consider making the savings required by pulling men out of Europe, not cutting programmes and manpower in the US. The US spends about 6.6% of its GDP on Defence compared with 3.4% in Europe. As the **Sunday Times** put it:

> " As the noose gets tighter around the neck of the military, that argument will be heard increasingly in Washington."

We can expect renewed pressure on Japan to spend more and on Germany to abandon its favourable response to Gorbachov's overtures on European arms limitation. Thatcher's boisterous clamour in Kohl's ears at the recent summit is merely the start of the noise he can expect to have hurled at him.

Japan Takes Up The Reins

As for Japan it is already eagerly picking up the torch left for it by the Pentagon. The Japanese Defence Agency recently were busily leaking documents demanding the transformation of Hokkaido, the closest point to Russia, into a fortress capable not only of defence but of attack. It is clearly being seen as the tete de point for invasion of the Russian Far East and is clear evidence of the success of the Japanese bourgeoisie in moving away from a role restricted to the "defence of Japanese Territory" to a more aggressive role on the northern Pacific. In the coming year Japan plans to increase its military expenditure by 5.2% to 3.67 trillion yen (£10 billion). If its expenditure were to be calculated the same way as in NATO the true figure would be about £25 billion, making Japan the third biggest spender in the world, after the US and Russia.

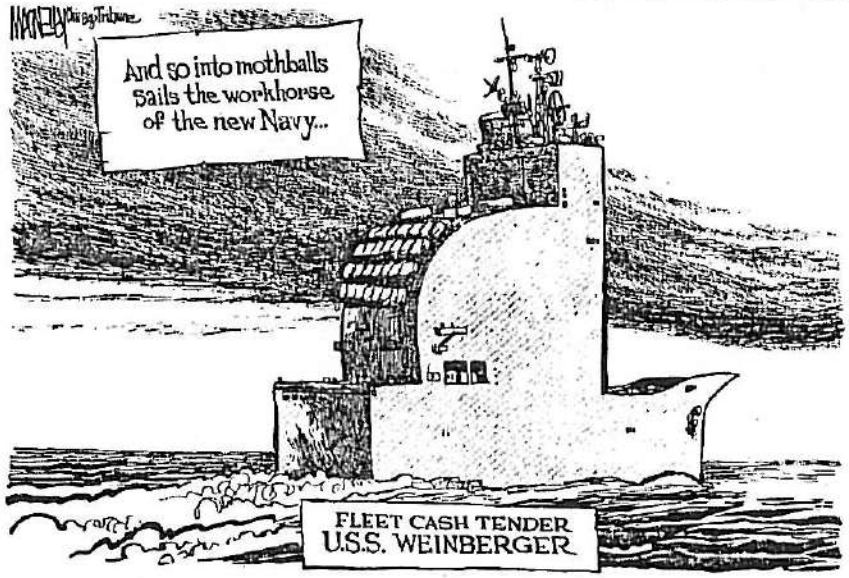
"Star Wars"

We cannot even rule out the prospect that the US 'holecard' **Star Wars** will be abandoned, finally accepted for the scientific nonsense that it is. Already there have been statements from prominent scientific institutions in the US admitting that the entire concept, even if it worked, would in no way do what it has been touted to be able to do; that it is a complete waste of financial resources at a time when every cent is needed elsewhere in the military budget. We should not be surprised therefore if in coming months the possibility of Star Wars going as part of a final summit flourish from Reagan or a starting gambit from whoever takes over the Presidency, doesn't emerge.

For it should not be assumed that the perils of economic austerity are understood only in the West. Yevgeny Primakov, the Director of the Moscow-based Institute of the World economy and International Relations, one of the primary think tanks of Russian foreign policy recently wrote an article in **Pravda** stressing exactly the dangerous effect of the economic crisis on the military capabilities of both the blocs. He was primarily concerned with the effects on an already battered economy of any further military expansion in response to a Western upgrade and espansion of expenditure. He urged an end to "excessive" military expenditure if Russia was to bridge the already wide economic gap with the US. He argued that this could be done with a turn to a new Eastern Bloc strategy of "defensive sufficiency" in which both blocs, in order to cope with their economic difficulties, would seek parity of arms at lower levels. He argued further that a Russian committment to detente, disengagement outwith its heartlands would be necessary to persuade the West that such an offer was real. Thus it would appear that both sides has good cause for accepting a pause in their military build ups even if the logic of capitalist competition forces them closer to a situation in which they have to fight to survive at all.

This then is the state of affairs which confronts the bourgeoisie in the West. After nearly a decade of massive military expansion, of preparation for military exchange with the Russians, the decay of the capitalist economy, affecting capitalist state in both East and West, faces them with insurmountable problems if their masterplan for the defeat of the Russian bloc as a solution to the crisis is ever to become a reality. They now must once more turn again, with increased vigour to the pauperisation of the proletariat, not merely in the peripheral economies but in the very heartlands of the capitalist system, if they are to squeeze out the surplus they need to gear up for the World War they know is coming.

Ingram



"IT WAS TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY"

"Bliss it was in that dawn . . ."Wordsworth's sentiment about the French Revolution might well have been written by those who lived through the political ferment of the late 1960s. This was a time when to would-be revolutionaries everything seemed possible. Imagination was the guide and it looked as if reality could be made to conform to its demands. But twenty years on the world has changed. Gone is much of the light-hearted euphoria and naive optimism. The dream of 1968 has turned into, if not a nightmare then at least something which is more hard-faced, grinding and "realistic". The goal remains that of the classless society but not only has our understanding of how this is to be achieved changed, the very context of action is dramatically different from the days when "to be young was very heaven".

Twenty years on from the May Days of 1968 is a convenient moment to reflect upon the development of the revolutionary movement, to ponder its strengths, its weaknesses and its future.

Firstly, let's say something about the politics and the context of the upsurge of 1968. The decade of the 1960s was the period when the apparently unstoppable growth of post-war capitalist reconstruction began to falter. The economic "miracle", of little more than 15 years duration, was coming to an end, the rate of "accumulation" went into decline and there re-emerged the old capitalist bogey of general economic stagnation. In the 1950s economies had grown considerably, particularly those of western capitalism. They had gone far beyond not only the trough of the 1930s Depression but also the war-time accumulation of the '40s. The bourgeoisie gained not only by extending the structure of capital but also it seemed as if significant sectors of the working class were gaining unprecedented material benefits from the post-war reconstruction. Paradoxically these gains made by the working class were predicated upon the massive historical defeat it had suffered two decades earlier. Economic growth of the kind witnessed in the 1950s was only possible because of the existence of two earlier mutually complimentary conditions: the defeat of the European proletariat in the '20s and '30s and the subsequent ability of imperialism to unleash war upon the world. The destruction of class consciousness, increased exploitation and the devaluation of capital in the war was just the shot-in-the-arm that the bourgeoisie needed to restart a period of accumulation.

From 1945 until the mid 1960s it seemed as if not only had the bourgeoisie of western capitalism solved their economic problems but also that mass class wide proletarian struggle was a thing of the past. This vision of a "classless society", of the emergence of social consensus within a managed economy, was epitomised in the bourgeois notions of the 'End of Ideology' and Keynsianism. Ironically, part of the would-be revolutionary movement of the 1960s was profoundly impressed, or rather blighted, by these visions.

Despite what bourgeois ideologists believed and irrespective of the tendency for greater accumulation to occur in the West, class struggle had not gone away. Strikes and other manifestations of the proletariat's existence litter the period (not to mention the massive struggles which swept the Russian block). At the same time there emerged in the West mass inter-class movements which were, to a large extent, the breeding ground for revolutionary militants. Nuclear Disarmament in Europe, Civil Rights in America, to some extent both coalescing in the Anti-Vietnam War struggles, were the ferments within which the consciousness of many were formed and which ultimately had explosive force in 1968.

The general condition which underpinned the events of 1968 was the slowing down in the rate of capital accumulation and the subsequent need to boost the rate of exploitation. Thus there emerged conditions for social upheavals which went beyond region and sector.

Where did revolutionaries stand in relation to his post-war melange? Before revolutionaries could effectively work in this environment certain basic realities had to be more or less grasped: the defeats of the Twenties and Thirties and the existence of the so-called "Socialist World" of Russia. Some sort of understanding of these two elements plus an explanation of the period of reconstruction were essential parts of revolutionary life in the 1960s.

One example of how a revolutionary organisation confronted and resolved these problems is that of the British based **Solidarity**. Despite its main strength being in Britain this organisation not only had influence beyond one capitalist state it was also the mouthpiece for the theories of Paul Cardan a thinker whose views influenced events in 1968. Also it is true to say that the core of the re-born revolutionary movement in Britain in the 1970s was largely formed from ex-**Solidarity** militants.

Cardan, the **Great Man** of **Solidarity**, was a reconstructed Trotskyist who managed to blend elements of Keynsianism, bourgeois sociology and degenerated proletarian positions. The success of Cardan's theories was built upon, to a great extent, the very shaky foundations of a flourishing capitalism, a capitalism which had shown significant growth over a period of not much more than one and a half decades. Cardan and his organisational acolytes were mesmerised by the period of reconstruction. They both fell victim to the belief that as economic growth was now continuous, as states were now able to intervene and manage economies so the classic marxist theory of crisis and exploitation was no longer relevant. Indeed Marxism was characterised as not only historically redundant but also a "traditional" theory which was essentially bourgeois. The notion that the exploitative class relations of capitalism were inevitably economically unstable was dismissed as so much nonsense. Cardan believed that the "gradual increase in living standards is inevitable", this because economies were under rational control and not subject to the vagaries of hidden laws. In this type of analysis the hallmarks of Keynsianism are clear for all to see. Cardan's empirical observation of the post-war

development of capitalism was mediated by Keynsian economics. Apart from this he worked with theories on bureaucracy promulgated by sociologists such as Michels and Weber, also notions from the Frankfurt School and libertarian councillist views found in the works of revolutionaries such as Anton Pannekoek. This eclecticism produced a theory which banished the marxian proletariat from the stage of history. The very idea of a revolutionary class had no real meaning in the work of Cardan. Although **Solidarity** often directed itself at workers there was no necessary reason why this should be so. Once the classic marxian theory of exploitation had been rejected to be replaced by one based on alienation and which saw revolts against alienation as the central contradiction of "modern capitalism", so any attempt to intervene in industrial struggles was merely a question of contingency.

Cardan's notion of alienation has little in common with that found in Marxism. His philosophy hinges upon an individualist ontology which has more in common with the empiricism of David Hume than the historically constructed one avowed by Marx.

Not surprisingly, when tens of thousands of "de-classe" students and millions of workers all over Europe took to the streets and went on strike in the 1960s **Solidarity** believed that this finally validated its political and philosophical programme. Paris in 1968 was seen as the great struggle against alienation:

> " undoubtedly the greatest revolutionary upheaval in Western Europe since the Paris Commune (N.B. not since 1917) . . . thousands began to query the whole principle of hierarchy . . . There wasn't an 'economic crisis' even in the loosest sense of the term . . . The falling rate of profit just didn't come into the picture . . . The central conflict to which all others are related is the conflict between order-givers and order-takers".

Ironically, at this moment of apogee, at this moment when **Solidarity** seemed to find its historical justification the ground upon which it had established its historical reality began to slip from under it. And in this process of dissolution many revolutionaries, not only those who had followed the precepts of Cardan, were thrown into a state of some confusion. They found themselves faced with problems which, whilst they were not wholly new in the history of revolutionary struggle, were articulated in a new environment.

The very condition which Cardan claimed was no longer of any relevance, economic crisis, began to re-emerge in the heartlands of Europe to haunt both the bourgeoisie and revolutionaries. The wave of strikes which swept across Europe in the late 1960s rather than being the product of some individualist "alienation", workers separated from the decision making process, was in fact a response to direct attacks upon workers in industry. Certainly striking workers made "decisions"; they resisted the demands of "order-givers" but this was no more than the "traditional" collective class response to increased rates of exploitation. Without this the working class is nothing. **Solidarity** and Cardan missed the point that collective action arose from the universal condition of exploitation which identifies the class situation of workers. In the late 1960s the re-emergence of the economic problems of capitalism pressed down upon the working class. Although atrophication of Solidarity's political brain prevented it from grasping the dynamics of the growing crisis it was, nonetheless, capable of sensing that something was happening to capitalism. By 1971 one of the organisation's experts in economics could write:

> " The problem of continued stability in advanced capitalist economies need not imply that economics is no longer of interest to socialists. Some economic problems are still relevant".

Still relevant! In 1988 the naivety of this statement is somewhat startling. But for a Cardanist to even hint at such a thing was akin to preaching heresy.

Regardless of what the Cardanist Canutes believed the unfolding of the economic crisis could not be stopped. If we take the British economy as a particular example of a general trend we can see that all the classic manifestations of decline were more and more to be found: declining rates of profitability and a growing pool of unemployed. Glyn and Sutcliffe calculated that pre-tax rate of profit (not directly equivalent to the marxist rate of profit) declined by about 30% between 1964-71. Not surprisingly, as profitability declined so also did the rate of economic growth, falling by 50% in the same period. Simultaneously, and as a consequence, unemployment soared. At the time of the French May Days of 1968 unemployment in Britain stood at about half a million; by 1971 this had risen to almost 800,000 an increase of 60%. By today's standards this is small beer. But in 1971 it was unprecedented in the post- war period. Hundreds of thousands of workers on the dole marked not only the bankruptcy of capitalism but also that of Cardanism and its related ideologies.

At one and the same time the onset of crisis presented revolutionaries with severe problems and new possibilities. The problems boiled down to coming to terms with the end of capitalist reconstruction and the possibilities were presented by the global nature of the crisis.

Like the life of the May-Fly the optimism of May'68 was briefly experienced. But it was not all in vain, for there did emerge from it the core of the revolutionary movement which exists today.

The reassertion, albeit at a low level, of the economic crisis of capitalism meant the eclipse of the movements of the 1960s. Many revolutionaries found themselves faced with the need to reconstruct their visions of what constituted the class dynamics of capitalism. The simplistic libertarian nostrums so important in the 1960s no longer worked. New organisational principles and practice were needed as was a coherent critique of bourgeois society. Only the much despised marxism could supply this.

But it was not some imprecise marxism which could come to rescue the disorientated movement. It could only be a marxism which was aware of the real revolutionary legacy of the period 1917-20s; a marxism which reclaimed the historical experience of the working class and which pointed the way forward to a re-born international communist organisation. There were, and this remains true today, only two strands of marxism capable of supplying clarity on lessons of the past and giving guidance for the future; the traditions of the

Italian and German Left Communists were the only ways forward. In effect this meant that if a new orientation was to be achieved it needed the intervention of existing organisations which defended these traditions, either those Italian groups which looked to the bordighist tradition for inspiration or the hybridist stance of the French group **Revolution Internationale** (RI). In the event the Italian groups were either unable or unwilling to take up the challenge of the defeats of 1968-70. It fell to RI to take the initiative, to try and organise and lead the disparate and confused revolutionary minorities which survived into the early 1970s and which realised the inadequacy of the tired old libertarian myths.

As far as the British experience goes RI made a crucial intervention in 1973 when it set out perspectives for a revolutionary realignment to a meeting of militants in Liverpool. At the time a number of revolutionaries resented the certainties and the "arrogance" of RI which seemed to drop into the meeting like a parachutist. But in retrospect it is clear that the certainties and the arrogance were simply greater clarity. It was an organisation committed to marxism in general and the Left Communist tradition in particular. The perspectives it offered were to become the guiding principles for the greater part of the revolutionary movement of the 1970s.

From 1973-75 the nascent movement developed and grew in size and coherence. I will not detail the trials and tribulations of this period suffice it to say that at this time there emerged two groups which were to make fundamental contributions towards defining and organising revolutionaries. These groups were the **International Communist Current** (ICC a direct outgrowth of RI) and **Revolutionary Perspectives** (RP later transmuted into the **Communist Workers Organisation**, CWO). Regardless of how the CWO has viewed the ICC and assessed it the latter's contribution to the reformation of the revolutionary milieu made it by far the most important revolutionary organisation of the 1970s. Not only had it a genuine international presence but it was also imbued with a political critique which was firmly rooted in an historical appreciation and appropriation of the class dynamics of capitalism. Working from the insights of RI the ICC eschewed a-historical absolutes such as trades unionism is and always has been anti-working class. In opposition to this sterile approach it argued for the necessity of recognising the difference between progressive and decadent phases of social and historical development. It was only by grasping the meaning of the present decadence of capitalism that revolutionaries could understand the nature of reformism in all its manifestations: trades unionism, labourism etc. At the same time this historicisation of working class experience forced revolutionaries to reassess the nature of the Soviet Union in general and the meaning of Bolshevism in particular. This latter problem presented itself as a crucial issue to the born-again revolutionaries of 1973.

Those who came from the libertarian tradition personified by Cardan had at one and the same time weakness and strength in facing up to these issues. Their strength lay in Cardanism's rejection of notions of the Soviet Union as a form of socialist society. Unfortunately this recognition was rooted in the idea that being an hierarchical society Russia was simply a variant of "modern capitalism". And, flowing from this, logically concluded that the Bolsheviks had always been part of the capitalist project for they were organised as order-givers and had played a crucial role in the emergence of the Soviet Union. Before revolutionaries could successfully move forward this mistaken analysis had to be jettisoned. Not an easy act for some. For example the grouplet **Council Communism** proclaimed to the Liverpool meeting in 1973 that:

> " Bolshevism is as socially reactionary today as it was in 1917 . . . Socialism requires the self-activity and autonomous organisation of the working class."

Cardan was alive if not wholly well and haunting the meeting in Liverpool. In a similar vein RP could include in its Platform of October 1974 the statement that:

> " though Bolshevism was at one point part of the class movement, it is not part of our own political origins."

This is certainly clearer than the position of **Council Communism** but it is nonetheless resonant with the sounds of the pick and mix eclecticism of Cardanism. Fortunately this refusal to assimilate Bolshevism to a central part of the revolutionary tradition was short lived and by 1975 not only had the CWO moved towards a better understanding of the Bolsheviks but **Council Communism** had developed and become part of the ICC (founded January 1975).

By the mid 1970s a movement had emerged committed to defending the lesson of 1917, to extending the political positions of the German and Italian Left Communists and to building an international presence capable of intervening coherently in the struggles of the working class. In the short space of two years many of the disparate elements which had been associated with the debates being held in Liverpool in 1973 had managed to make an enormous political leap. The "hot house" atmosphere of the deepening economic crisis and the heightened class struggle had forced rapid growth. A bit like garden plants some of this forced growth was not entirely healthy, nonetheless, the overall balance was towards greater rigour and revolutionary well-being. The movement grew not only in its theoretical horizons but also numerically. Admittedly numbers were not startlingly large but they were real and, given the immense difficulties faced by revolutionaries, such as the historical rupture of the 1930s-60s, were significant. An optimism was re-born, welling up from the strength of clarity, the obvious militancy of the working class and the universalization of the crisis. By 1975 it seemed as if they way forward for the working class and its political expressions were set fair. This optimism was exemplified by the CWO when it reflected upon the deepening of the economic crisis and the effect this had upon the class struggle. It had resulted in:

> " the most advanced outbreaks of class struggle for many years in Argentina, Spain and Portugal."

Continuing optimistically:

> " as the crisis deepens we can expect to see further upheavals there and advances by the class. The possibility of a fully developed seizure of power by the

proletariat cannot be ruled out and the preparation for such a 'bastion' must be bleak..However, as the crisis levels out over the next few years the advances made and lost in one area will be regained in another."

This perspectives article concludes with the confident assertion:

" Although the coming period contains many imponderables, one thing is clear - the long night of counter-revolution is ending and we stand on the brink of the second revolutionary wave of our century."

In the year of its formation the ICC showed a similar, if a less cataclysmic, optimism. It was committed to the perspective of accelerating and continuous growth of class consciousness:

" No capitalist organisation can withstand an almost continuous wave of strikes and proletarian self-activity without becoming demoralized. Thus the class as a whole will begin to reappropriate the communist struggle and begin to deepen its global consciousness in real confrontations. The time lag between mass class actions will shorten, and a growing memory and lessons will be placed at the disposal of the working class."

Looking back at 1975 we can see that at that point the revolutionary movement had reached a plateau. Most of the major theoretical-political work of reclamation had been achieved with greater or lesser success. At the same time its numerical size was not to significantly increase over the next thirteen years. The waves of struggle which we have witnessed since 1975 have not produced a reciprocal and continuous wave of new militants to feed the revolutionary movement. Apart from these features the movement of the mid-Seventies was marked by a variety of dogmatisms which, far from tending to produce a unified international organisation, were in fact increasingly appearing as a barrier to unification. Thus within the greater strength of development was to found a crucial weakness.

An expression of the inherent weakness of the movement was the extent to which it was buffeted by the rise and fall of class struggle; rather than influencing events as confidently predicted, organisations tended to be subject to knee-jerk responses to external events.

In 1977 the CWO was split. This split, well documented elsewhere was a product of inherent weaknesses within the organisation. Those who played a leading role in this split recognised the CWO as an organisation riddled with dogmatisms. Ironically, the same individuals had used this self same dogmatism to previously drive out a Liverpool based element in the CWO. Too late for the Liverpool comrades they realised their mistake and such was the nature of the CWO that their new-found clarity could not be accommodated within the organisation. Perhaps significantly these troubles within the CWO hit the group in a period of downswing in class struggle. By 1978 the idea of a proletarian 'bastion', no matter how beleaguered, appearing had disappeared. In the midst of the Firemen's strike of that year the CWO ruefully noted that:

" Both in scope and quality the class struggle has declined from the heights of the years 1972-1974."

And again in a text submitted to the Second International Conference (see below), in November 1978:

" The most remarkable fact about the class struggle in the past 2-3 years is its virtual non-existence ...the class has exhibited little more than passivity since the mid 1970s."

And on the 10th anniversary of 1968 the CWO remarked:

" For the moment the initiative lies entirely with the ruling class."

The ICC also recognised a change in class struggle. In fact this group decided to shift the short-term defeats pinpointed by the CWO back another seven years. The decade 1968-78 was one in which, according to the ICC, the working class had been "defeated"; as a consequence this had:

" allowed the bourgeoisie to regain the initiative through the unions and the parties of the left."

For the ICC the slow maturation of the crisis had wrong-footed workers whereas this slowness had worked in the bourgeoisie's favour by allowing it to develop strategies for attacking and containing the proletariat. Unlike the bourgeoisie workers were in a state of "apathy and disorientation". Paradoxically, despite this decade of defeat, the ICC believed that there had been a continuous strengthening of the revolutionary movement. In a passage which smacks of world-spiritism the ICC claimed that revolutionary groups:

" have strengthened themselves and their programmatic positions and have extended the scope and impact of their interventions...their progress is testimony to the advancement of consciousness within the class."

Despite the defeat, and unlike the CWO, the ICC still saw the way forward for the class and its revolutionary groups as generally unproblematic.

But what was the reality behind the rhetorical claims of the ICC? The CWO had split; numerous other individuals and groups had come and gone from the revolutionary scene; the ICC was still ostensibly a healthy organisation open to debate and pushing for an international realignment of revolutionaries. As is well known, from its very inception, the CWO had been openly hostile to the ICC. Up to the split of 1977 this remained the case; indeed the dogmatism of the CWO towards the ICC was the primary reason for the split. After the split this hostility did not change; what did alter was the international political orientation of the CWO. This change in orientation was to play a significant role in the development of the revolutionary movement.

The International Conferences.

In April of 1976 the Italian group **PCI (Battaglia Comunista)** invited a number of organisations to meet to discuss the social-economic crisis of capitalism. This was a major intervention by the PCI as it envisaged that the proposed conference would lead to the:

> " creation of a centre which could co-ordinate everything that the conference considers possible and necessary on an international scale."

And this "centre" would allow revolutionaries to leave behind:

> " the state of impotence and inferiority into which they have been led by provincialism fostered by cultural factors, by a self-satisfaction which denies the principle of revolutionary modesty, and above all by the depreciation of the concept of being a militant, which is rejected as a form of sacrifice."

Battaglia hoped that revolutionaries would:

> " finally leave the ideological Tower of Babel and avoid dismemberment of the existing groups."

It appeared as if a real opportunity was to be presented for revolutionaries to come together with their new-found clarity. This was not to be. It was an opportunity missed which, at the end of the debacle, left the movement weaker than it had been at the time of the original proposal.

At first it seemed as if something good was to come of it. A number of groups initially responded positively. The French group **Pour Un Intervention Communiste (PIC)** agreed to participate as did the ICC and the CWO. However, at the first International Conference sectarianism very soon raised its ugly head. PIC denounced the meeting as a "dialogue of the deaf" and left. One down, more to go. The conference ended with an agreement to continue discussion but there was a sour note and a hint of things to come when Battaglia and the ICC had an acrimonious "debate" over whether a Declaration should be issued.

A year later in November 1978, another Conference was convened. Like its parent of a year before this one was also plagued by sectarianism. The Spanish group **Fomento Obrero Revolutionario (FOR)** proudly proclaimed that it was "firmly convinced of the importance of an international organisation of the proletariat". This, however, was not to be achieved by discussions:

> " we have other tasks to fulfil and consider ourselves outside the framework of this meeting."

Exit left, one more group. Once again it fell to Battaglia and the ICC to be the main protagonists of competing views of organisation and intervention. Yet again discussion broke down and this time, more disastrously than at the previous conference. Battaglia approved the ICC's proposal that a joint resolution be issued on the need for continued open discussion. In opposition it proposed a narrowing of the conditions for participation in future conferences. In effect this meant accepting Battaglia's view of the party and class consciousness. Thus the Conferences were to be part of a process of "decantation" and "exclusion"; a far cry from the real needs of the revolutionary movement. Apart from the stance of Battaglia, of particular importance was the role of the CWO at the Second International Conference. The impact of the splits in the context of the perceived "non-existence" and "passivity" of the working class pushed the CWO towards an orientation akin to that espoused by Battaglia. As the class had apparently failed it was up to the party to be the class consciousness of the proletariat. Consequently, Battaglia's partyist stance was looked upon as an answer to proletarian passivity. At the same time the long term antipathy nurtured by the CWO towards the ICC made it easier for it to side with Battaglia at the Second International Conference and to conspire at excluding the ICC from future debates. A third conference was held in 1980 and this was little more than a stage-managed event aimed at asserting one political view. As a rallying point for International regroupment it was worse than useless. Under the tutelage of Battaglia and its minor partner the CWO the so-called International Conferences had become a barrier to revolutionary development. Such was the confused sectarianism of Battaglia and the CWO that at the Fourth International Conference (sic) the only other presence was the Iranian **SUCM**. This organisation defended a bourgeois programme; its saving grace in the eyes of Battaglia and the CWO was its adherence to their notion of the party. Thus the irony of history: proletarian groups were banished from participation but a bourgeois organisation was welcomed.

This was the emerging reality which lay behind the claim of the ICC in 1978 that there was a clear and continuous "advancement of consciousness within the class". Far from this being the case, the opposite was true for revolutionary organisations. It was bad enough that the ICC was being excluded from the International Conferences but worse was to follow. The ICC was on the brink of all but destroying itself, although to read the public statements of the period one would think otherwise.

The ICC's Degeneration.

By 1979 the ICC noted a change in the constitution of the class struggle. Once again workers were about to confront capital, notable examples of this new-found combativity being the steel strike in Britain and the nation wide struggles in Poland. Not unnaturally as the struggle re-emerged so the ICC's optimism reasserted itself. If there is one thing which the ICC is characterised by it is its ability to draw general laws from contingent events. During the Steel strike, for example, it was stated that "it is a general law in the life of proletarian organisations" that when the class is militant so proletarian groups tend to regroup. With the ferments of 1979-80 one could thus expect a strong assertion of this law. Certainly ICC militants were filled with euphoria during this period: struggle was said to be moving towards "international simultaneity", towards a "semi-permanent strike wave". Far from this leading to an international regroupment quite the opposite was to happen. As we have seen the initiative of Battaglia had fallen apart. This was bad enough. Worse was to happen to the ICC. Not only was international regroupment off the agenda but the ICC itself was about to discover that its much vaunted openness had become a sham and that this was to lead to major splits within the organisation.

As with most splits within the revolutionary milieu this one has been well documented so there is no need to repeat here the whole sorry affair. Suffice it to say that it is important to reflect upon the fact that the ossification of the ICC's centre became apparent during a period of intensified class struggle. Particularly important was the steel strike in Britain. The emergence of strike committees and how they were to be understood was crucial in subsequent events. The pressure of external events highlighted two deficiencies within the ICC. One was the immaturity of the organisation vis a vis experience in going to the class and intervening. This inexperience manifested itself as a series of disagreements about the class nature of strike committees: were they simply tools of the trades unions; were they fully proletarian organs or were they hybrids which might go in either direction? Clearly, how these questions were answered, influenced how the committees were confronted. These debates were not in themselves a weakness. Without debates like this revolutionary organisations cannot develop. But for development to occur the debates must be capable of continuing in an open and fraternal manner. Tragically the ICC, cut off from the International Conferences and paranoid about losing its achieved clarity, put down the shutters on debate. The central organs refused to countenance any opinions which questioned their promulgated decisions. On the edge of the 'Years of Truth', as the ICC called the 1980s, the Current began to fall apart. By 1981 the ICC had lost a significant number of militants, through a mixture of "exclusions"(!), expulsions and resignations. Its paranoia had increased to the extent that it could no longer tolerate internal discussion and it became a joke (a bad joke) within the revolutionary movement.

The 'Years of Truth'.

The 'Years of Truth' have not been good for the revolutionary movement. Battaglia and the CWO have come together to form a so-called International Bureau which, to use Battaglia's own phrase was helping to "sort out" the revolutionary movement. This relationship has been far from fruitful, a case of will they/wont they, get "married". Whilst the Bureau has continued to function, working for example with new groups which have emerged in India and Mexico, it has not become the rallying point for an international regroupment. It has not grown in size, nor has it been able to significantly intervene in the waves of class struggle which have been seen in the present decade. At the same time it remains hidebound by the dogma of its partyism which occasionally manifests itself in an opportunist way. It remains proletarian but shows no sign of being able to respond to the demands of revolutionary regroupment.

The ICC has disintegrated even further. The emergence of the so-called **"External Fraction"** has further weakened this once important organisation. Its bunker mentality has grown to the extent that it is difficult to see it breaking free from its self-imposed paranoia and isolation. The waves of class struggle which we have seen over the past seven years have not had any positive effect upon the ICC. It's always possible that future events might confound this pessimistic view of the Current; however things do not look rosy.

This brief survey of the 1960s-80s has omitted much detail. It has not mentioned a host of groups and individuals which have fallen by the wayside over the period. If great detail had been given it would merely have substantiated the picture of a revolutionary movement which had undergone rapid, healthy development up to the mid 1970s, thereafter to go into general decline, failing to live up to its own high hopes. If this was simply a product of external circumstances then this would be understandable, if unfortunate. Whilst external forces most certainly did shape the rise and decline, in themselves they do not explain every moment of revolutionary vigour and decline. The tragedy of the movement to date is that it has actively pursued policies of sectarianism. It has nurtured closed minds and has, as a result, suffered the consequences.

Looking Back...

Looking back at the past twenty years it is clear that the militancy in the working class constantly re-emerges. The working class has not let revolutionaries down to the extent that it continues to oppose the attacks of capitalism. Just look at the history of the World over the past two decades: from South America to China to Europe etc. every region of the world has experienced big waves of class struggle. Without this the class is nothing. But where is this struggle to go? Obviously to revolution; well, this is the goal. Achieving the goal and desiring it are not necessarily the same thing. For all those groups which the CBG consider to be the most important in the revolutionary milieu, especially Battaglia, the ICC and the CWO, the problem of achieving the goal is one which looms large. The CBG, along with these three other groups, holds that success in the revolutionary struggle can **only** be achieved by a unification, or a conjunction of the activities of the working class and the political programme of the vanguard organisation. For those libertarians who continue to believe in the revolutionary organisation as accelerator, the decade of decline in the proletarian milieu is more an aggravation rather than a necessary source of weakness. For the other groups however, this is not the case. For the CBG, the ICC and CWO and Battaglia all accept the premise that the political organisations of the proletariat are crucial for the development of extreme militant struggle into revolutionary confrontation. Organisations of the working class not only bring to the class its own history but from that history extrapolate the goal of a classless society and tactics and strategies for achieving this end.

The experience of the proletariat amply illustrates how disjuncture between the class and its political expressions can have a profound effect upon the cause of workers' fight against capitalism. See what happened in the 1920s and 30s when the counterrevolution swept revolutionaries aside and sowed not only defeat among the working class but also confusion within its political vanguard. When the new movement emerged in the 1970s it fought hard to re-establish much of the lost ground. It was successful in building a base upon which a larger revolutionary structure might be erected. Tragically, the story of the past two decades has not been one of general advance. As has been indicated above, the brief period of very positive development has been almost completely eclipsed by a larger one of almost internecine warfare between groups. In many ways the milieu is weaker now than it was a decade ago. Divisions which were emergent in the 1970s have now hardened into dogmatic barriers of such strength that it is difficult to see how they can be overcome. Certainly it does not seem at all to be correct to believe that greater militancy in the working class will draw revolutionaries together. This was not the case

with the Polish struggles, the Miners' Strike etc. Quite the opposite in fact happened. There was no concerted action to intervene in these struggles. Organisations constructed all sorts of reasons not to work with others. Of course the situation might be different if and when an international wave of class struggle sweeps capitalism, where the proletariat moves into direct and deep confrontation with trades unions and reformism generally. It is possible that in such a conjuncture revolutionaries could well move towards some degree of common purpose and unified action.

But it is easier to hypothesise this than to realise it. The course of history, if this is not too grand a phrase for the past two decades, does not bode well for the proletariat or its political expressions. Unified action will not spring from nothing. Continued action is a sine qua non for future activity. And this future is obviously marked by how we organise today. Consequently, it will not do to have blind faith in the belief that at some confrontation in the future all differences will be, if not resolved, then at least momentarily made secondary in the larger fight. To begin with the ability to recognise deepening class struggle and to be able to judge the extent, the breadth, of the revolutionary movement are perceptions which develop within living political organisations. An organisation which spends the greater part of its time tracking down heresy within itself or denouncing external variants is unlikely to be able to grow with the course of the class struggle. More likely it will become increasingly paranoid and less able to glimpse the commonality of purpose and activity which should unite the interventions of revolutionaries. Bad enough that such a sclerotic condition should be inhibiting the revolutionary blood of one organisation of the working class. Worse that it should be the **defining** feature of the past ten years. But this has indeed been the case.

...Looking Forward.

All is not, however, lost. There remains a way forward. Revolutionary marxism is stamped by a belief in the transforming power of consciousness. Not of course a transcendental-spiritual one which operates at a supra-historical level. Rather, consciousness as a product of large historical forces set within specific contexts. For the working class to throw off the chains of capitalism it is necessary for a set of general objective conditions to exist which cannot be finally specified beforehand, other than to say that they must be such that they effect large sections of workers as a class and thus tend to unify responses. As revolutionaries we are not affected in the same way as the proletariat. We have the ability to inaugurate major changes within our milieu without the need of large external objective forces. In other words, as revolutionaries we already start from the recognition of the uniqueness of the working class and its organisations. We have a critical awareness of the conditions of class struggle and the stakes being played for. This consciousness is the condition which allows us to change course before it is too late. We can actually stop this drive to self destruction which, if we are correct in our assessment of the importance of revolutionaries, would mean not only the destruction of the working class but also of more or less all mankind. These are the stakes. And as we continue to divide ourselves from each other so capital gains and so we move further away from realising our goal of a classless society.

Flett

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Whether Tories or labour would have won there would have been no real change in the bosses lineup against the workers.

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Two Texts for Defining the Communist Programme.....page twenty nine
ILM of 'International Correspondence' A review of his recent book on the programme of the Transition Period, the capitalist nature of Russia and China and the defeat of the revolution in Russia.

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obituary?

We print below what amounts to a self-obituary by the **Wildcat** group. The situation is still unclear, it not being inconceivable that the group will rise from the ashes in some form or another before too long - and we will comment in more detail when the full facts are at our disposal.

It should be stated at the outset that nobody in the revolutionary movement should take any pleasure at the disappearance of another organisation, particularly as it seems to involve militants abandoning politics altogether. The **CBG** rejects any notion of a 'Darwinian' survival of the fittest.

The death of **Wildcat** can be ascribed to several factors:

1. One opportunist regroupment too many.

2. The difficulties every group in Britain has experienced in surviving a particularly quiet period in the class struggle, accentuated by **Wildcat's** problems in re-orientating their activity after the defeat of the Miners.

3. A failure to take seriously the issues raised by the **CBG** on the question of organisation; dismissing our work on monolithism and non-sectarianism as obvious and our analysis of the decline of the **ICC** as pointless.

Readers will note that the Statement refers to intense debates within **Wildcat** on various issues - was anyone outside the group aware that these differences existed? Why weren't the debates made public so that the rest of the movement could join in? How did **Wildcat** come to take positions and deal with minority views?

We take heart from the stated desire of the ex-**Wildcat** members in Manchester to find some way to continue political activity. We hope to continue joint work with them, offer them space in the pages of the **Bulletin** and invite them to participate in the process of political regroupment in Britain.

MARCH 1988

Dear Comrade(s),

This letter is being sent to you with the agreement of 3 of the last 4 surviving members of the Wildcat group. It effectively marks the end of the 'old' Wildcat and announces our intention to work together in a reorganised way under a new title (yet to be decided) along with some ex-members of Wildcat and other revolutionary communists.

Although throughout its existence Wildcat has generated continuing political interest - as witnessed by a steady stream of requests for literature, offers to distribute our journal and leaflets, reproduction of our original material, and regular correspondence from this country and abroad - none of this managed to materialise in the form of active membership. The group never exceeded a membership of about 12 at any one time, and losses of membership over the last couple of years eventually reduced us to just 4 people, located in 4 different cities.

As with many similar small groups the reasons for people leaving were a mixture of the personal and political. Some suffered demoralisation and exhaustion following our intensive activities during the defeated miners' strike. Others, committed to an 'activist' orientation for the group, became tired of seemingly endless internal debates over what they regarded as, at best, secondary issues. Equally, a few thought the discussion and debate within the group very inadequate. Added to this were the usual working class problems of employment, housing, unemployment and so on. Also there was the exaggeration of personal conflicts engendered by the hot-house atmosphere of a tiny political group.

Changes in the way Wildcat was organised - forced on us by circumstances - also contributed to the demise of the group. In its early days the entire membership was concentrated in the Manchester area. This encouraged a high level of active participation, accountability and fruitful discussion among all members. It also made possible the thriving local (but not localist) collective intervention in the class struggle which we regarded as essential to the group's political development. We hoped that similar groups would emerge in other parts of the country, and that 'Wildcat' would grow through joining up with such groups after a period of joint discussion and activity. It was this approach that prompted us to promote the 'Intercom' discussion journal and conferences. As it turned out, however, Wildcat became a 'national' organisation more through accident than by design: some members left the Manchester area, new members joined from other parts of the country, and there was the fusion with the Stoke-based 'Careless Talk' group, some of whom later moved to Nottingham. Thus within a fairly short period of time our resources became very thinly-spread, and the effect of this dispersal of our forces was to put great strain on the organisation as a whole. Members delegated to carry out certain tasks often did so without a sufficient sense of responsibility to the group as a whole, the internal communication of information about activities and political discussions was frequently inadequate, and many political disagreements which might have been resolved or at least clarified face-to-face degenerated into sterile slanging matches when forced to be conducted through written polemics. In short, the all-important

task of effective collective intervention in the class struggle became more and more difficult to carry out.

Having said this, it is necessary to record some of the more important political differences which have arisen during the last couple of years.

Teachers

The long-running disputes amongst teachers and the period of school student strikes and demonstrations saw a number of different responses from members of the group. While all members of the group supported the students' actions, there were differences in our attitudes towards the teachers. With the exception of one member, all agreed that teachers were part of the working class. Some members considered that teachers' role was a contradictory one involving social control & conditioning and genuine education (albeit within the restrictive framework of the capitalist state). This view regarded teachers as a backward section of the class, yet still capable through struggle - particularly during periods of widespread and intensive class struggle generally - of challenging both their own exploitation and their role as 'soft cops'. Other members, on the other hand, regarded this prospect as too dim and distant to have any practical bearing on our interventions for the time being, and emphasised the teachers' role as 'soft cops' as the primary one in determining our response. They argued that pupils could no more support the demands of their teachers than prisoners could support the demands of screws. At the same time they saw strike action by teachers (or screws) as being useful since it broke down the structures of control and often allowed pupils (or prisoners) to take their own action.

Riots

The group as a whole was invigorated by the outbreak of major urban riots in the British cities and analysed them as an important part of the class struggle. We all expected that riots would re-emerge as an element of future struggle but differed on the significance of such struggle and its importance in relation to workplace struggle and other forms of working class community struggle such as rent strikes, mass squatting etc. One member regarded riots here and abroad as more significant even than the Polish mass strikes or the French rail strikes, primarily because of their violent confrontational nature. In opposition to this some members emphasised that riots were unlikely to provide a basis for wider mass confrontation, since they were geographically limited and sporadic in nature. Others considered that as riots were part and parcel of the broader class struggle any attempt to separate them from strikes and decide which had greater value was divisive at a time when links needed to be made. The significant role of riots in the miners' strike and at Wapping coupled with the wave of prison riots in Britain seemed to make this balancing-out act particularly inappropriate. Internationally the resistance to capitalist austerity measures seemed to take the form of both riots and strikes and at high points of struggle the separation between these two forms tends to disappear.

Reactionary Sections of the Working Class

The group has always been concerned to address itself to the realities of the class struggle rather than simply repeat revolutionary slogans and this led to a re-examination of the perennial calls for working class unity in situations such as Northern Ireland and South Africa. Some members more or less wrote off, as permanently reactionary, the Protestants in N. Ireland and the white workers in S. Africa until after the communist revolution itself. In this situation, it was argued by at least one member, our propaganda should be specifically addressed to the 'most oppressed' section of the working class e.g. the northern Catholics in Ireland. In the case of N. Ireland this approach was rejected but over S. Africa the issue was rather fudged (viz. the headline 'All Power To The Black Working Class' in Wildcat 9), perhaps because from this distance the gap between black and white workers did indeed seem so unbridgeable.

Workers' Democracy

Wildcat had always argued for the generalisation of class struggle through mass assemblies, workers' councils, delegate strike committees, etc. We were clear that such 'forms' of struggle did not guarantee success or the movement of the struggle in a revolutionary direction, but were opposed to elitist and conspiratorial methods of organisation that consciously excluded the mass of workers from participation in the struggle. In this we were also concerned to point out the connection between today's struggles and the future communist society where social affairs would be decided either by consensus or 'democratic' decision-making through society as a whole. And yet clearly some actions in the present-day class struggle such as the miners' hit squads had to be organised by small minorities with, at best, only the passive support of other miners involved in the struggle. Also, it often happened that the mass assembly would take reactionary decisions or even hand over authority to 'outside' groups. In such situations it seemed necessary for militant or revolutionary minorities to reject the authority of the mass meeting and try to organise in other ways. It was recognised that the process of class struggle was a contradictory one, requiring militant minorities to take action themselves but always with a view to drawing in larger and larger sections of our class. In this process workers' councils etc were essential and had to be argued for, even if at a later date, when the struggle subsided, they became empty shells and a fetter on the progress of further struggle. The evolution of our views had been aided

by a challenge to the concept of "workers' democracy" in the Workers' Playtime article 'What Distinguishes Wildcat' in 'Intercom' 5. Although certain views were mistakenly attributed to the group in this article, it nonetheless produced a lot of discussion in the group, forcing us to make our position clearer. Eventually a certain level of agreement was reached on the relationship between militant minorities and the mass movement (see Capitalism and its Revolutionary Destruction), yet a conflict between the "workers' democrats" and the "anti-democrats" remained. Some of those opposing democracy did so on the basis of a critique of democracy as an atomising force, an accountancy of opinions which goes hand in hand with commodity production. The community of struggle which arises against the attacks of capital must attempt to abolish the separation between decision-making and action - a separation the "anti-democrats" felt was institutionalised by the tradition of workers' democarcy. Much of the conflict within the group wasn't helped by one of the "anti-democrats" who saw everything in terms of a clear-sighted minority fighting the state despite and against the mass of the working class which was dominated by ruling class ideas. This last position tended to distort the discussion away from elaborating a critique of democracy and towards balancing minority action against mass action. As with the question of riots versus strikes this was again a false opposition.

We can briefly outline the area of agreement we have reached on this issue as follows... It is the position of the working class within capitalism which forces them to take action. In the past workers' councils, mass assemblies and factory committees have emerged as organs of struggle. The weakness of these organs has been the extent to which they reduce themselves to organs for "democratic self-management" of enterprises or to "parliaments of the working class". At any given time it is usually only a minority of the working class which is in struggle. They don't struggle because they are more "conscious" than other sections of our class but usually because they are more under attack. Consciousness emerges through struggle as we become aware of the terrain of struggle and the nature of our enemies. The role of revolutionaries in all this is to promote links between these struggles internationally and promote/participate in and spread those actions which are seen as the greatest threat to the maintenance of capitalist social relations. Minorities may be the spur to action but it is mass struggle alone, eventually encompassing the vast majority of the working class, which will overthrow capitalism.

Whilst all the group's members did not divide up in exactly the same way on every one of the issues described above, there was a tendency for a split to occur in which members found themselves sharing the same 'side' as more or less the same collection of other members whenever a disagreement occurred. Thus, although this necessarily brief outline of the political differences which arose within the group can not do full justice to the evolution and progression of our views and all the subtleties and shades of opinion on each issue, the same members who, for example, dismissed the teachers' strikes as politically irrelevant were also likely to place a greater value on the significance of riots, reject calls for class unity as abstract sloganeering, and emphasise the positive role of minority action in pushing forward the class struggle. Facing the 'faction' which took this line were the other members of the group who emphasised the 'opposite' point of view on each of these issues.

Thus, whatever our agreement on basic communist positions, the differences of opinion outlined above, combined with the personal and organisational difficulties described earlier, made practical collective activity increasingly difficult, and forced us to reluctantly conclude that the group was no longer viable.

The three members who have agreed to circulate this 'obituary' intend to continue working together along with some sympathisers and ex-members in the production of leaflets and the publication of a communist journal. The journal will be more open than 'Wildcat'; articles will still be discussed collectively but they will no longer try to reflect the views of the whole group. Hopefully this will lead to a more fruitful process of written discussion. All contacts and subscribers have been sent a copy of this letter. We will keep you informed of our future activities and welcome contributions and participation. We can be contacted at:

Box W, c/o Raven Press, 75 Piccadilly, Manchester, M1 2BU and
Box W, c/o 180 Mansfield Road, Nottingham

The fourth member can be contacted at BM Wild, London, WC1N 3XX. This member may or may not continue to publish in the name of Wildcat. Please note that this contact address is used by other revolutionary communists besides the individual referred to above.
The following publications are avaliable from the Manchester and Nottingham addresses:

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LENINISM OR COMMUNISM (by Jean Barrot) 25p
WHAT IS COMMUNISM (by Jean Barrot) 70p
COMMUNISM no.4 (GCI) - from Notts address only

N.B. Please send blank cheques, postal orders, cash etc. as we do not have a bank account in the name of 'Wildcat'.

Ripples in the Pond

When our fraction split from the **International Communist Current** six years ago, it was both an expression of a state of crisis in the revolutionary milieu and the starting point for all the political work we have done since then to understand the nature and roots of that crisis and what it means for the working class and the role of revolutionaries. With a certain few exceptions, the response to our analysis and specific proposals was either one of hostility (extremely so in the case of the **ICC**) or a studied and profoundly irresponsible refusal to acknowledge and debate our contributions. (In the case of the **Communist Workers' Organisation**, this was taken to the absurd length of even refusing to MENTION our fraction in print.) The continued impasse of the working class and the stagnation (in many respects regression) of its revolutionary fractions two decades after the re-emergence of left communism in the events of 1968, has been looked at by us once again in the article in this issue dealing with the history of the current revolutionary movement.

However, after the article was written and as this issue was going to print, it became clear that our concerns about the predicament of revolutionaries was finding an echo elsewhere. Correspondence with the **CWO** has indicated what they call a major reassessment of their understanding of the nature of the period and of the consequences for revolutionaries. This arrived too late for a response now but we have included it without comment at the end of this **Bulletin** and will of course, respond at length in the next issue. More importantly, the latest issue of **Internationalist Perspective**, [No.9], the organ of the **External Fraction of the ICC**, contains an article **"The Decline of the ICC - The Roots of Degeneration"**, which, in a very direct fashion, echoes much of our own analyses. We think this is a very important article for the whole milieu and we will respond at length to many of the issues as soon as we can. For the moment, we wish only to point out the most positive features of the article.

The starting point for the **EFICC** is the understanding that the specific crises of the ICC and its subsequent decline and degeneration can only be fully understood when located within a much fuller understanding of the nature of the historical period which confronts the working class and its revolutionary minorities. The defeat of the last revolutionary wave of 1917-21, and the emergence of the fullblown political consequences of capitalism's move into its period of decadence - in particular, the development of state capitalism - has meant the destruction of any possibility for permanent self-organisation by the working class outside of specific high points of struggle. The demise of the Second International and its passage into the camp of Capital has meant that for the bulk of a century the working class has been dominated in its day-to-day existence by the organs of the bourgeoisie. It no longer has that vital experience of organising itself for economic struggle and political emancipation that was provided prior to the last revolutionary wave by the Trade Unions and the various mass political parties.

The result is a profound dislocation of the class from its political past and future potential. For revolutionaries, the most dramatic, immediate consequence of this is a revolutionary milieu which is unimaginably smaller and more isolated and remote from the class than at any point in history. **Our situation is historically unprecedented.** Until that is understood, any attempt to apply the lessons of revolutionary organisation from the past must be doomed to grotesque failure. Despite the overwhelming starkness of the qualitative change in our situation from pre-1917, the revolutionary milieu has simply been unable, or unwilling, to grasp the problem. This point is so important to grasp that we must risk boring our regular readers by quoting ourselves yet again:

> " In 1903, the Party" (the RSDLP) could afford to pay about 30 full-time distributors of Iskra (That is considerably larger than many entire organisations today). By 1905, there were just under 10,000 Bolsheviks. As a result of the insurrection, that rose to 34,000 by 1906. In the same period, there were 14,000 Mensheviks. In the RSDLP as a whole in 1907 there were 84,000, excluding the Bundish, Polish and Lettish sections ... All this has to be set against a total working class population of perhaps 3½ million.
>
> Of course, it is not just a question of numbers. The numbers are only an expression of the much more important political reality that the Bolsheviks and the other revolutionary fractions, were a <u>living part</u> of the class. Noting the <u>size and</u> influence of the revolutionary fractions is just another way of understanding that revolutionary politics and tradition were firmly implanted in the class's own consciousness and activity.
>
> Today, we are unimaginably remote from that situation. We are confronted with - at best - a few hundred communists in the whole world, attempting to intervene in a working class, totally unfamiliar with revolutionary positions and its own revolutionary heritage and which remains totally unaware of our existence."
>
> The Bulletin No.3.

The explosion of class activity in 1968 and the exhilaration of the re-emergence of communist clarity and organisation unfortunately obscured this fundamental reality. The illusions and unspoken assumptions of that fledgling movement are now a crippling weight upon us all. We cannot go forward unless we confront and deal with them.

As the **EFICC** point out, our fundamental assumption that the deepening economic crisis would find its counterpart in deepening class struggle and a corresponding growth in the size and influence of revolutionary fractions has been confounded by reality. The inevitable ebb and flow of class action shows no sign of long term weakening of combativity, but there is an undoubted impasse in the MATURATION of the class's consciousness. The

picture for revolutionary fractions is even more gloomy. There has been no growth in numbers and influence. In many respects we are considerably worse off than in the early seventies, with clear programmatic degeneration in some cases, a fragmentation of resources, and an overwhelming growth of rancour and vicious sectarianism which has all but destroyed any possibility of regroupment. We entirely agree with the **EFICC** that the failure to, first of all RECOGNISE the reality of the crisis facing us, and secondly, to understand its roots, will profoundly cripple and distort revolutionary work, with despair giving birth to voluntarism on the one hand, and the sterility and megalomania of substitutionism on the other. It is in this failure that the **EFICC** locate the organisational and programmatic degeneration of the **ICC**.

So far the **EFICC** has covered essentially the same terrain as the **CBG**. What conclusions do they draw from this? Essentially:

> " ...in this period, theoretical elaboration (of which clarity in intervention is an integral part) is a much higher priority than organisation building ... Therefore, political clarification is our main task today."

How do the **EFICC** think this can be achieved in the present period? As a starting point, they specifically reject the bureaucratic and monolithic practices of the **ICC**, in which debate came to be feared then crushed, and where the real life of the organisation came to reside solely in the central organs; organs which themselves were grotesquely distorted by the emergence of "family cliques" (It has to be said that without a thoroughgoing recognition and rejection of the IDENTICAL behaviour by the **ICC** in the splits of 1981, and the role that the current membership of the **EFICC** themselves played in those events, there must be, at the very least, some doubt about the profundity of their current critique of the **ICC**.) However, leaving aside this doubt, what do they offer as an alternative to the current posture of the **ICC**? At this point the article becomes very sketchy, pointing largely to a greater commitment to more thorough-going and OPEN debate both within the organisation and within the milieu at large, plus a recognition that this must be accompanied by a more fraternal and more open relationship between the different elements of the milieu.

They correctly state that a crucial weakness of the revolutionary milieu is -

> " ...its lack of political understanding as to how the revolutionary process unfolds today. How class consciousness develops, what the role of revolutionaries is in this development, how the capitalist context has changed in this epoch,.."

And also that -

> " ...this task cannot be fulfilled by any one group."

We can endorse these perceptions wholeheartedly but unless the theoretical and practical consequences are fully understood, they must remain at the level of wishful thinking and pious hopes. It is precisely these issues that we have attempted to grapple with in articles, texts and public correspondence in each issue of the Bulletin. (In particular, we would point readers to **Bulletin 3**.) The implications of the analysis invade every area of revolutionary activity and will have to be confronted by the comrades of the **EFICC** in a more developed fashion than they have attempted so far.

1) Internal Functioning. The desire for more thorough and more open debate will be doomed to impotence unless it is understood that there are organisational consequences which must flow from this desire. We reject the suggestions of the **EFICC** that this is simply a question of statutes. It is a question of understanding the reason for, and the functioning of, centralisation; of rejecting the notion that central organs are the producers or defenders of clarity. It is a question of understanding that minorities are a healthy, inevitable and necessary part of the whole process of clarification; and that they must be allowed the means of existence and public expression.

Regroupment. The **EFICC** are quite correct in understanding that the tasks facing us cannot be undertaken by any one single group. Neither the Party itself, nor the clarity of programme and action required, can be the product of any single organisation. They will be a product of a process of clarification involving the entire revolutionary milieu. This understanding too has organisational consequences that the **EFICC** have yet to clarify. In a simple, immediate, practical sense, it demands what the **CBG** has been calling for since its inception: fraternal recognition of the rest of the milieu and its communal interests and responsibilities; open and continuous debate between us; a willingness to provide space in each other's publications; a policy of joint work and intervention where possible; exchange of publications; servicing of bookshops for each other etc. None of this is a luxury and none of this can be undertaken simply for narrow self-advantage. It is an inseparable part of the process from which clarity and the Party will emerge.

On a more profound level, if monolithism and sectarianism are to be confronted and minimised, particularly when we are in a period such as this when we are almost entirely isolated from the class, we must re-examine the whole question of programmatic self-identity. We must be clear what positions are essential for an organisation and which are simply moments of debate. Comrades must ask themselves what the reality of "taking a position" is in the current period. Remote from the class and each other, it often means a simple show of hands from a roomful of people after a debate which is largely academic and contemplative. This is an extremely flimsy basis for clarity and an even flimsier basis for sectarianism.

Role of the Party. We stand on this point with the comrades of the German Left (and we think also with the **EFICC**) in arguing that the leadership role of the Party is discharged primarily via the clarity of its programme and its slogans. Our task is not to organise the class like Lenin's "General Staff" but to point the way forward, to lead, within the class's own self-organisation. The whole shape and content of our work springs from this understanding. Everything the **CBG** has argued about how revolutionaries must organise themselves and their work rests on this and NOT simply on an understanding of the specificities of the current period.

The **EFICC** have raised fundamental issues which must be addressed by the whole milieu. We have only been able in this very brief response to list some of the major areas we believe have yet to be developed. We have, of course, covered much of the

ground in past issues of the **Bulletin**, and we will have further responses in the next issue. For the moment, we support and endorse the **EFICC's** appeal to the rest of the milieu and hope that they themselves are serious when they say:

" We call upon the rest of the milieu to explore the burning questions with us, to abandon mutual grudges and exclusions and to open itself to the most open and thorough debate possible."

Communist Bulletin Group.

LETTER From The CWO

As we go to press we have received an important communication from the **CWO**. The next issue of the **Bulletin** will contain a detailed response to this letter including a rebuttal of some of the many inaccuracies in it regarding the CBG and, more importantly an analysis of what this latest 'turn'means for the **CWO**. However we felt it best to print this letter now for the edification of the milieu as a whole without waiting until the next issue of the **Bulletin**.

After some preliminary remarks about a Public Meeting held by the **CWO** in Aberdeen which they cancelled at the last minute due to the illness of the speaker the letter continues:

.....This was doubly unfortunate, as it would have allowed a wide-ranging discussion on the course of history as evidenced by the events of 68-88. We are undergoing a general reassessment of the present period, based on the evolution of the economic crisis and the class' response to it, and its impact on the class' living standards, composition etc. The text that should have been delivered in Aberdeen will be in **WV 41**, but broadly speaking we have rejected what we feel is our last baggage from the ICC, ie. the idea that May '68 opened up a new period, the end of the counter revolution and the beginning of a new revolutionary period. Instead of the idea of wide, sweeping historical cycles of revolution and counter revolution, linked to periods of crisis and reconstruction, we now see capitalist development as alternating periods of capitalist domination of the class (which may or may not be periods of economic crisis), and briefer "pre-revolutionary" periods, where this domination is challenged, which could be for a variety of reasons (war, economic crisis). But what we are now definite about is that this is NOT a "pre-revolutionary" period, but a continuation of the capitalist domination that has reigned, to be only fitfully contested, since the end of the post-WW1 revolutionary wave. There are, as I'm sure you will agree, many consequences of this, but one which flows is the solution to the conundrum so dear to the ICC and all its offshoots and epigones. "Why in a period of rising class struggle is the vanguard doing so badly?" The problem is wrongly phrased, or rather, there is no problem. The vanguard is doing badly because this is not a period of "pre-revolution", but a period of (increasing) capitalist domination. We regret having been unable to hear your responses to these points.

The problem of our "relations with the CBG" and our view of your dilemma, we would also have outlined rather more fully than we were able to do at the interval of a football match on one occasion, and on the path out of a bothy on the other.

In one sense things have not changed: our position is as it always was. While arguing that (by your own admission) you occupy no independent political ground, and therefore are not a real group, we are, as we have always been, willing to engage in debate with you (vide our public meetings, invitation to our educational meetings)

and joint activity (vide our invitation to a Falklands leaflet, which you will recall, you rejected). All this on the one condition that you ceased you hostile attitude to us, shown by your publication of our internal documents, and harbouring of irresponsible fugitives from our ranks, and retailing of their lies against our organisation. But really there is, I'm sure you will agree, no point in continuing to debate all these issues. There is a much more fundamental one, a much more pressing one, ie. "Whither (if anywhere) the CBG?"

The CBG has now been in existence about 6-7 years. You proclaimed it was not your intention to start a new tendency but to start a debate in the milieu over "monolithism", "bureaucracy" and other issues. Well, you have blown the trumpets all these years and the Walls of Jerico have not tumbled down. For whatever reasons (see below) the milieu has not responded at all on these issues. Not only that, but I'm sure you would agree that apart from a few international refugees, the CBG has attracted no-one to its ranks, other than the founding magnificent seven. Now it is true that all groups are doing badly at the moment, but your own lack of impact is unparalleled, except for, significantly, the famous External Fraction of the ICC. All organisations have to periodically take stock, but with the CBG, taking such stock is imperative at the present time. As we see it, there are only FOUR possible options on the question of the direction in which you go (If there are any others we'd be interested to hear of them). These options are: -

1) You decide that, given the stunning silence that has greeted your trumpet blasts, the whole milieu is a racket, political activity a sham etc. This is one sure way out of political activity.

2) You carry on as before, indefinitely. Then the CBG would simply become its own raison d'etre, a group of old chums who meet to pass comments on the world. This can lead to no other end than the option above.

3) You can decide that you have no alternative to forming a new international tendency, to rival the ICC, BIRP etc. At the present period, with your postures (officially) undistinguished from the ICC, and with your geographical problems, the difficulties of this would be obvious. But it would be a viable response to your dilemma.

4) You officially recognise that your positions have changed in several ways from those of the ICC (Albeit in a contradictory fashion, for us. In some ways you've got better [course of history, demands], in some ways worse [class consciousness] - but that's neither here nor there at the moment). And you then re-orient your activities towards theoretical work and the seeking of a new political direction. This, of course (we have never hidden the fact) is what we think you should do.

You have reached an impasse - and it is not an accident. You may think there are other options, like linking up with the Fraction. That might give you the resources to continue avoiding your basic dilemma, it will not give you the resources to solve it. Although the informal talks mentioned at the beginning of this letter showed that the CBG is aware of the existential angst at the core of its existence, they didn't give any indication that a serious debate on where the organisation was going was underway, or even anticipated. Option 2 by default seemed to be the strategy.

It is the duty of all responsible communist organisations, avoiding opportunism and manoeuvres, to try to stem the blood letting from the revolutionary milieu (cf. the predictable and predicted demise of Wildcat). We have approached the CBG in this spirit, because we feel that the organisation is at a cross-roads, and must make a political choice. Avoidance of choice will be a choice by default. We look forward to your response.

For the CWO.,

D.G.P.

ps. We have no objection to publication.